SPIRE
THE CITY MUST FALL

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By Grant Howitt and Christopher Taylor, 2018

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CONTENTS

Welcome to Spire 1

The World of Spire 3

The Rules 9

Skills and Domains 17

Equipment 19

Bonds 23

Characters 25
- Azurite 29
- Bound 33
- Carrion-Priest 37
- Firebrand 41
- Idol 45
- Knight 49
- Lajhan 53
- Masked 57
- Midwife 61
- Vermissian Sage 65
- Extra Advances 69

Combat 77

Districts and Factions of Academia 81
- The Benevolent Order of Wisdom and Discovery 81
- Brazacott Technical Institute 83
- The High Elven University of Divine Magic 85
- The Academy of Gywnn-Enforr 87

Districts and Factions of Commerce 89
- The North Docks 89
- The Sky Docks 93
- The Blue Port 97

Districts and Factions of Crime 101
- Red Row 101

Districts and Factions of High Society 107
- Amaranth, Frozen Home of the High Elves 107
- Ivory Row 110
- The Silver Quarter 113

Districts and Factions of Low Society 117
- Derelictus 117
- Perch 119
- The Garden District 121
- The Works 124

Districts and Factions of rhe Occult 129
- The Vermissian 129
- The Heart 133
- The Guild Of Morticians 137
- The Necropolis 140
- The Midwives 144

Districts and Factions of Order 147
- The City Guard 147
- The Allied Defence HQ 149
- The Council 151

Districts and Factions of Religion 155
- The Cathedral of Our Glorious Lady 155
- The Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress 157
- The Sect of Our Crimson Vigil 161
- Pilgrim's Walk 163
- The Solar Basilica 165
- New Heaven 169

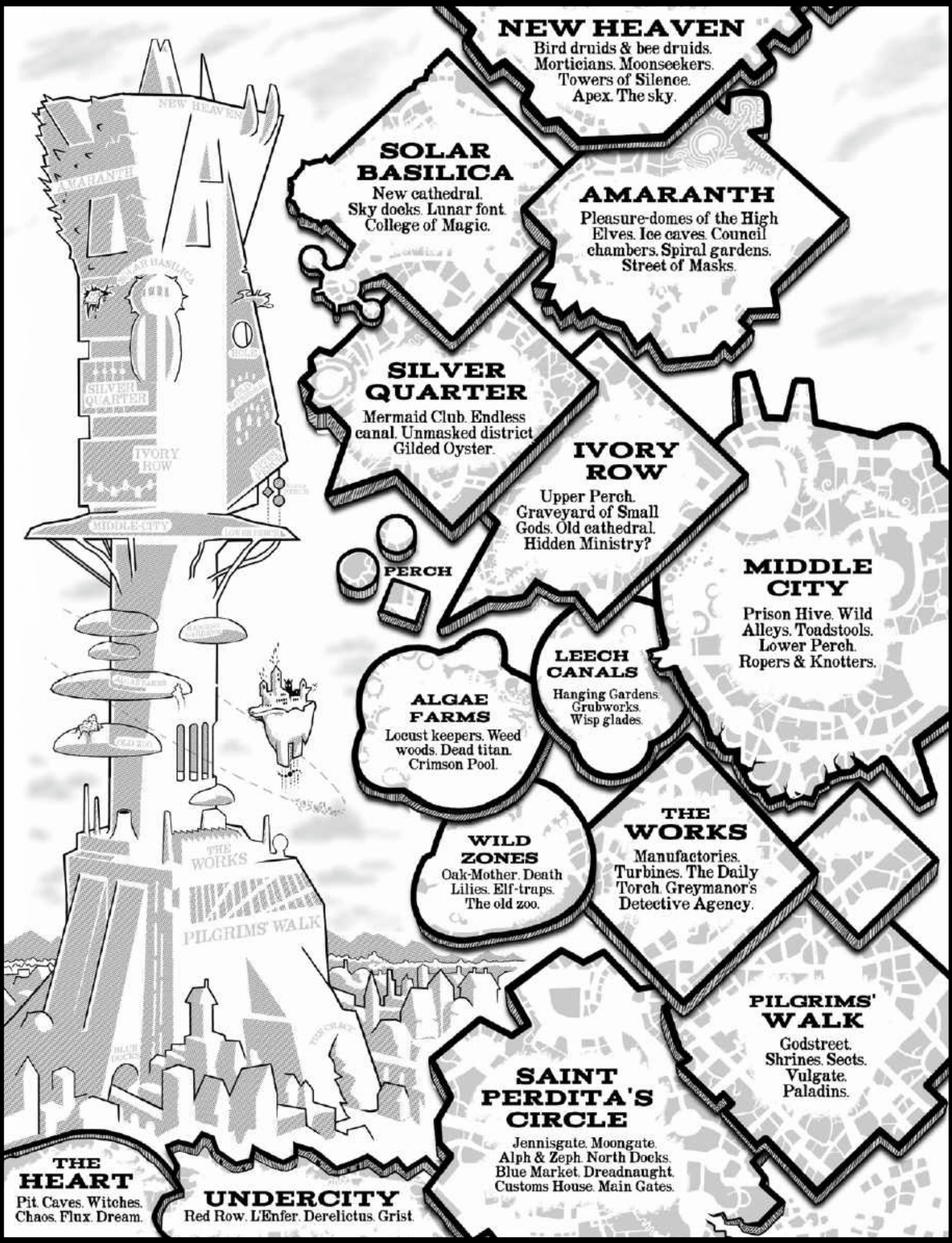
Running the Game 173

Appendices 183
- Appendix 1: The New Gods 183
- Appendix 2: Random Items and Events in Spire 200
- Appendix 3: Drow Glossary 205
- Appendix 4: Rumoured Goats of Spire 207
- Appendix 5: Known Arcologies, and Discoveries Found Therein 208
- Appendix 6: Antagonists 210
- Appendix 7: Suggested Media 211

Character Sheet 212

Index 213

Thanks and Kickstarter Backers 215


NEW HEAVEN
Bird druids & bee druids. Morticians. Moonseekers. Towers of Silence. Apex. The sky.
SOLAR BASILICA
New cathedral. Sky docks. Lunar font. College of Magic.
AMARANTH
Pleasure-domes of the High Elves. Ice caves. Council chambers. Spiral gardens. Street of Masks.
SILVER QUARTER
Mermaid Club. Endless canal. Unmasked district. Gilded Oyster.
IVORY ROW
Upper Perch. Graveyard of Small Gods. Old cathedral. Hidden Ministry?
PERCH
MIDDLE CITY
Prison Hive. Wild Alleys. Toadstools. Lower Perch. Ropers & Knotters.
LEECH CANALS
Hanging Gardens. Grubworks. Wisp glades.
ALGAE FARMS
Locust keepers. Weed woods. Dead titan. Crimson Pool.
THE WORKS
Manufactories. Turbines. The Daily Torch. Greymanor's Detective Agency.
WILD ZONES
Oak-Mother. Death Lilies. Elf-traps. The old zoo.
PILGRIMS' WALK
Godstreet. Shrines. Sects. Vulgate. Paladins.
SAINT PERDITA'S CIRCLE
Jennisgate. Moongate. Alph & Zeph. North Docks. Blue Market. Dreadnaught. Customs House. Main Gates.
THE HEART
Pit. Caves. Witches. Chaos. Flux. Dream.
UNDERCITY
Red Row. L'Enfer. Derelictus. Grist.

WELCOME TO SPIRE

This is Spire. A mile-high city in the land of Destera, ruled by cruel high elves, in which the drow – you, and your family, and your friends – have been oppressed for centuries. A nightmare warren of twisting passages and structures, built and rebuilt, atop itself. A city of a thousand gods. The furthest bastion of a terrible and burgeoning empire. A structure of unknown make that houses a blistering, rotten hole in reality at its centre where the sane dare not tread.

You have joined the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress, a paramilitary cult that worships a forbidden goddess, and sworn in blood to avenge the wrongs placed upon you and your people. You have made an oath to fight the high elves, to subvert and capture their resources, and to take Spire back into dark elf hands once more.

It is a cruel and thankless task, and your family would most likely report you to the city guard if they found out what you did at night. But it is a task you have sworn to perform, and you will kill for it. You will die for it, too.

CONVENTIONS IN THE TEXT

D10: A ten-sided dice.
D8: An eight-sided dice.
D6: A six-sided dice.
D3: A six-sided dice with the result halved.
Dx: A variable dice type.
Situation: A single scene of roleplay, give or take – this is not an exact term.

We use male, female, and the non-gendered pronoun "they" throughout this game. We use "dice" to refer to both single and multiple dice.

WHAT IS SPIRE?

Spire is a roleplaying game. If you've never played one before, it's pretty simple, even though it can sound a bit intimidating. You play it gathered round a table (or on an online chat program) with your friends. One of you takes on the role of the gamesmaster (or GM) – they're in charge of coming up with the basis of the story, adjudicating how the world works, and acting as the supporting cast, villains and the city itself. The other players will each take control of a single character (or Player Character, or PC) who, together, will be the protagonists of the story of fantasy revolution that you're all going to tell. They'll control that character, making decisions for them and speaking as them, and help them get into exciting trouble.

The story of Spire is one of rebellion. You and your friends will become drow freedom fighters, clawing back their city through subterfuge, sedition and brutal violence. They will have to risk their relationship with their community to save it from the cruel overlords of Spire – what are they prepared to lose to liberate their people? Who are they prepared to hurt, or kill, to see Spire under drow control once more?

BEING A GAMESMASTER

If you're reading this book, odds are that you'll be the gamesmaster – that's the way things tend to go in this hobby. As the gamesmaster, you'll be in charge of physically managing the game (i.e. where and when it takes place, who plays, and so on), you'll create the antagonists, you'll describe the world, and you'll dictate the pace of the game. If this sounds like a lot of work, don't worry – it's easy, and it's fun, and we've written a whole chapter to help you out later on in the book (page 173).

BEING A PLAYER

If you're invited to be a player in a game of Spire, then it's your job to help the gamesmaster and the other players make a brilliant story full of ups and downs. You'll create your character (which is a pretty quick and easy process, and we'll guide you

through it) by selecting a class – like a profession or identity – and making a few choices within that. Once you've got a character, it's up to you to get them into (and maybe out of) trouble, and tell an engaging story with the other players.

When you play, describe what your character does, and the GM will react. Occasionally, you'll have to roll dice (when something's at stake that you'd rather not lose) but most of the time you'll just have a conversation focusing around telling a story in a grim fantasy world.

While playing, you can refer to your character in the third person, such as: *"Desaine walks over to the guard, draws herself up to her full height, and asks him to move out of the way."*

Or you might talk in the first person: "I've had enough of this. I storm over to the guard, straighten out my back, and say: 'Excuse me, sir, but we have permits that allow us to be here.'"

Or you might do both. It's up to you – the only wrong way to roleplay is if you don't enjoy yourself while you're doing it, or if you upset the other players at the table out-of-character.

WHAT IS FANTASY?

We use "fantasy" as a shorthand to describe tales of swords and sorcery – elves, dragons, goblins, knights, floating castles, dwarven gold hoards, magical staves, and so on. In Spire, we've put our own urban twist on fantasy, exploring what happens when you put standard fantasy tropes in a city. Here's where Spire differs from standard fantasy:

MAGIC IS HARD. Magic costs something to cast; it withers your body, your mind, and sometimes more esoteric resources too. Divine magic – that is, magic sanctioned by a church or temple – tends to be reliable and less dangerous, but also less potent, than occult magic. Occult magic can melt the side of your brain off, but maybe also do it to someone else too.

MAGIC ITEMS ARE RARE. Most people will go their entire lives without seeing a magic item; the knack for making them has been all but lost, and those that exist today are ancient and unknowable or cobbled-together and unreliable.

WE'RE NOT OFF TO THE WILDERNESS. Assume that every game of Spire takes place within, or at least on, the walls of the titular city, unless something goes wrong. There's more than enough inside to keep you entertained, we hope.

THERE'S NO MORALITY SYSTEM. No-one thinks they're the bad guy. Everyone believes their actions are justified. No spell is going to let you detect whether someone's Chaotic Evil or not, which is useful, because you might have to do some reprehensible things to free your people, and lie to your family about it.

THERE AREN'T ANY MONSTERS. You're not going to be kicking in doors and shanking orcs, safe in the knowledge that they aren't people, and are therefore fine to kill. Everything you'll struggle against in Spire is, or once was, a person. A bad person, perhaps, but still a person.

PLAYING THE GAME

Most of the time, when you play Spire, it takes the form of a conversation between the players and the gamesmaster – the gamesmaster describes the world, the players describe the actions of their characters, the gamesmaster reacts, and so on. For most of the game, you won't be using rules or mechanics at all.

However, when a player character makes an action that's risky, dangerous or important – or the gamesmaster thinks it would be interesting to see them struggle – then we use dice to see if they succeed or fail. The gamemaster shouldn't ask the player to roll unless there's something at stake.

When your character performs an action and the gamesmaster asks for a roll, you'll roll at least one ten-sided dice (hereafter called a D10). The higher you get, the better your character succeeded, and the less stress they took as a result of attempting the action.

Stress is bad, as it represents all kinds of minor negative effects on your character. The more stress you accrue, the more chance you have of it ticking over into something serious. Luckily, there are lots of different ways of removing stress, but more often than not you'll find yourself choosing between your own safety and the success of the revolution.

THE WORLD OF SPIRE

Spire is a mile-high impossible city, older than anyone can remember. Two hundred years ago, the high elves – or aelfir, strange and beautiful masked creatures from the far north – took it from the dark elves after a brutal and bloody war. Now, they graciously allow dark elves, or drow, to live in the city if they perform four years of service to an aelfir lord once they come of age. From Spire, the aelfir continue their conquest down to the south, and are caught up in a bloody struggle with the hyena-faced gnolls of far Nujab that they fight with armies of ingenious human mercenaries.

THE LAND OF DESTERA

Destera, once ruled by the drow noble house of the same name, is largely made up of temperate highlands and black-grey slate mountains. In spring and autumn, rains roll in from the mountains to the north and drench Spire and the surrounding farmland; in summer, it is baking hot; and winters are short but harsh.

To the north, the high elves still hold their ancestral homes – great fortresses of ice and thorn, defended by legions of devoted warriors – and the land is trapped in a perpetual winter, and time itself grows slow and brittle in the cold. Far across the inland sea is the Eastern Domain, ruled by the Wanderer-Kings of the humans, who build homes around ancient arcologies and plunder them for secrets to defend themselves against the beasts that plague their lands. To the distant south, the gnolls maintain a desert civilisation, the crown jewel of which is Al'Marah – a cosmopolitan city that stands fast against the heat of the sands – and closer to Spire, the mountain region of Nujab sees weekly skirmishes between gnoll outlanders, nomadic drow from the neighbouring lands of Aliquam, and the armies of the high elves.

And to the west, the Home Nations of the drow burn, wracked with a civil war that has spanned generations and killed hundreds of thousands of dark elves. Refugees spill out from the splintered borders and flood into Spire on the promise of safety and security – but few, if any, find it upon arrival.

THE DROW

The drow live in underground cities and covered towns to the west, for thanks to the ancient curse that span them apart from aelfir, they are burned by sunlight. Their skin (which is dark black, ashen grey or alabaster white – they are a monochromatic race) blisters and weeps when exposed to the sun. Those who wish to go outside during the day must don hats, headscarves and cloaks, and smoked eyeglasses, or risk sustaining rash-like burns and searing pain.

Rather than bearing a foetus until it is fully developed as most mammals do, drow produce two or three small, fleshy eggs that must be carefully tended to and nurtured over six months until the baby within is grown enough to survive outside. The job of nurturing the unborn falls to the parents and a caste of spider-blooded drow known as Midwives, who hold moderate political sway within Spire. It is in part through this communal raising process that drow derive their strong sense of community, which is reinforced through aspects of their most active religions.

Drow form an underclass in the city, subjugated by the aelfir, and work in a variety of menial roles – either for a pittance, or unpaid as part of their durance. The majority of drow live and work in the cramped environs of the Works and the Garden District, but some have mastered the art of ascending in an aelfir-dominated Spire and live comfortable lives in the Silver Quarter or serve as experts in the centres of academia towards the top of the city.

THE AELFIR

No-one can say for sure what led the high elves to curse half of their number millennia ago and turn them, over time, into the drow. But meet a high elf and talk to them for a while and you'll see that such arcane cruelty is entirely in their nature.

The aelfir – as they prefer to be called – have magic running through their veins. They are creatures of blazing and beautiful colour whose feet barely touch the ground when they walk and whose perfect hair flows as if caught in a gentle wind. While some deign to spend time among the populace of Spire at large, most of them live their lives in walled districts of perverse and audacious luxury.

THE CURSE

Some say that the drow are not cursed – that they were never aelfir, that they could never endure the touch of the sun's light, that they were born underground as a different species entirely. But these radical drow historians are rare in Spire, because they are often persuaded to say otherwise and reinforce the accepted wisdom that the dark elves are changed, deformed high elves – and wind up dead if their evidence to the contrary becomes too compelling. No-one can say for sure where the race originated from, but the aelfir seem keen to maintain the status quo.

THE HUMANS

Humans die young – at the age of sixty, or so, compared to the drow who stay vital until around their hundredth birthday and then quickly turn to dust, and the aelfir who extend their lives with sacred rituals and dark surgeries well into their second century. This short lifespan has filled humans, the aelfir reckon, with an insatiable desire to discover and build, to create and leave marks upon the world.

The humans, originating from a vast island far to the east, discovered the ancient arcologies of those who came before – and unlike the aelfir and drow who kept the strange artefacts found down there as curiosities and trinkets, they broke them down and retro-engineered the technology into their own inventions.

As a result, humans invented the gun, and things have never really been the same since. They form the bulk of the aelfir mercenary armies, and can commonly be found in Spire.

DROW TRADITIONS

What follows is a loose collection of traditions practiced by drow in Spire – a mix of Home Nations customs and modern culture.

Wearing clothes that cover the skin, and dark glasses that protect the eyes, is a necessity for drow who wish to spend any time outside during the day. Wealthier drow, usually those in league with the aelfir, will use parasols or shades to hide from the sun. Many drow choose to cover most of their skin whenever they are out of their homes, whether it is day or night.

Artificial light is important to the drow, and most make a habit of carrying a candle and matches with them wherever they go.

Taking malak, a mild depressant, after work or before sleep is commonplace among the drow, but recent aelfir legislation has made it a serious crime to possess or deal the drug.

The traditional drow diet consists mainly of fungi, algae and the sort of scuttling insects that spend their lives living in the stagnant pools found in caves. Given that Spire is a more cosmopolitan city, the average drow will consume bread, meat, rice and spices on a semi-regular basis.

A customary drow greeting is to ask after the health of a person's family (or "fanmi," in the patois) before you ask after their own. Not many folk respond with a full list of symptoms – usually they just say they're "well" and carry on – but it's considered polite to ask.

In the Home Nations, and definitely in the Duchy of Aliquam, women are regarded with a higher esteem than men. In Spire, drow are largely egalitarian with regards to gender.

AELFIR TRADITIONS

The aelfir are a proudly traditional people, and they can afford to be, because they're in charge. Here are some common aelfir customs, although radical high elves might refuse them:

Always wear a mask in public. The more of your face it covers, the better.

Pay your respects to the Solar Pantheon, not the Old Gods, who were weak and powerless before their might.

Take regular ice baths to cool the blood and soothe the mind.

Never lower yourself beneath a creature of another race; to do so is an affront to your majesty.

Make beautiful things and display them prominently; improve nature with your handiwork.

THE MINISTRY

The Ministry does not officially exist. Drow are permitted, and indeed encouraged, to worship Our Glorious Lady – their mother-goddess the moon who they believe watches over them from the night sky. She grants her people, who cannot endure the touch of the sun, with light, restoration, inspiration and solace.

But: in dark caverns and secret basements, in shadowed back-rooms and hushed safehouses, they have begun to worship a different goddess. The dark side of the moon, never seen by drow eyes, is known as Our Hidden Mistress, and it is she who fills the drow with the strength to resist their oppressors, unseen and unheard. She is a goddess of poison and lies, a goddess of shadows and secrets, and a terrible and powerful creature indeed.

The secret society devoted to her is known as The Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress, or just The Ministry, and they are all sworn to destroy and subvert the dominion of aelfir within Spire. Working in enemy territory, they strike at the assets and allies of the high elves and fight a shadow war against their overlords in an effort to dethrone them from the council and run them out of Spire for good. Each minister, for that is the name of the operatives who serve her, is trained in combat, stealth, and misdirection after being carefully recruited from the populace of Spire. They are revolutionaries, and they are fighting an impossible battle, but that will not stem their bloodlust.

WHY IS SPIRE HERE?

Spire has been here, as far as anyone can tell, forever. Every record that survives of ancient times that mentions it gives no clue to its creators, but only its inhabitants; for a long time, it was thought of as a mountain, and for all intents and purposes it may as well be. What follows is a list of prominent theories explaining the origin of Spire, though none of them are anywhere near locating definitive proof:

Spire grew out of the ground as an organic object, a great tree of flesh, and now it is long-dead and the bones and flesh fossilised to rock (this view is popularised by necrofusimancers: mystics who say they can work the magic of undeath on the building's corpse).

Spire was once a towering creature that stalked across the landscape; it is still alive, but sleeping, perhaps waiting until the intelligent races of the world (that it views as bothersome parasites) die out and leave it alone.

The prokatakos, a distant precursor race, built it as a cap atop something terrible – a permanent demonic incursion, a site of grim sacrifice on an unimaginable scale, and the strange design is intended to dissipate the harmful energies of the rift beneath.

It is the larval form (or the dormant form) of some kind of deity, and said deity can be birthed or awoken given the correct impetus.

Ancient elves built it as a means of plumbing magic from the depths of the earth to light a signal fire for the gods, and thus brought religion to the world.

The gnoll horizon-breaker Ossiliex the Charmed conjured it into being millennia ago to capture a great and multifaceted djinn, focus and manipulate its otherworldly energy, and thus create the world.

Spire is the tip of the extradimensional ovipositor from which world-eggs are produced, and this one has nearly been disgorged entirely.

The city is a prokatakos machine that fell into disuse and disrepair eons ago, but its function would change the world forever should it somehow be activated.

Spire is a unique and beautiful musical instrument built by the god of music, who once played it with the winds and rain, but now the races living on and within it block the pipes and it no longer works.

The ancient sorcerer-kings of the drow used their unknowable magics to coalesce Spire out of falling moonlight, intending to use it to build a bridge to the moon and commune more deeply with their goddess. The bridge, it seems, was never finished.

It is the reflection of a city on the moon, a grimy and broken inversion of something perfect and glittering far above.

Spire is a vast consensual hallucination that all entities within accept as real.

It's just a really big building.

THINGS TO KNOW

Before you start play, here are some things to know about your characters, the city, and the people around you.

SUBVERT, DON'T DESTROY. Wrest weapons from the hands of your enemies and turn them against them. Recruit cells from other organisations, even ones that work against you, and use them as tools. If you kill someone in authority, someone will replace them and they'll probably be worse; turn them, instead, through blackmail or threats or bribery, and use them. You can't rule over ashes; you want the city to be standing when you're done. (Still: when it comes to it, don't be afraid to resort to bloodshed, especially when your cover is on the line.)

THIS IS NOT A KIND WORLD. There are soft and gentle parts of it; there are easy lives, but you don't have one. You were born into an underclass within an underclass. You have struggled for everything you have, and even then someone probably tried to take it away from you. You have been handed such a bad lot in life, in fact, that you have joined a radicalised cell who worship a forbidden goddess and murder people in order to get revenge.

YOU ARE BRAVE. People don't know what they want or, moreso, what they need. The drow need freedom, and you're the one to give it to them, even if that means hiding your actions. You are most likely lying to your loved ones, sneaking out while they sleep, and stockpiling illegal weapons under your bed. You are living one wrong step away from death every second of your life.

YOU ARE GOING TO HURT PEOPLE. That's unavoidable. It's a crime for you to spill blood, but it's "justice" when they do it. The city guard are drow, just like you – desperate, and hungry, and tired, but they're duty-bound to stop you. Who are you going to hurt to get what you want? Who won't you hurt? What will you do to preserve the secrecy of The Ministry and your mission?

THIS IS GOING TO KILL YOU. One way or another, you are going to die doing this. Maybe you've made your peace with it, and maybe you're lying to yourself and saying that you're smarter than everyone else, but if you stay active in the Ministry, you're going to wind up dead or mad or destitute or all three. The best hope you've got is offloading the danger onto someone else, earning the promotion to Magister, or retiring. But no-one really retires. So you burn bright, as best you can, and try to make a difference.

THERE'S ALWAYS ANOTHER LEVEL. You can't win this. Listen: you can take a street back, sure. Maybe even a district. But if you make too much noise, take too much territory, someone much bigger and more dangerous than you will notice, and they'll turn up and destroy you. So it's slow work, and you have to subvert rather than destroy, and that leaves you with risky assets all over the map, and when you finally secure a victory, one of two things happens: either it gets taken off you by your enemies or your superiors, or it causes you untold problems, and suddenly you're the bastards in charge, oppressing people. But that's how it goes, and better you than them. Right?

YOUR OWN FAMILY WOULD SELL YOU OUT. You know what ministers do? Ministers get people killed. Ministers used to meet in the cellar of the bar down the road, and then the Solar Guard showed up and burned it to the ground with everyone inside. Ministers abduct and kill people for reasons that no-one can fathom. Ministers draw the attention of the watch, and the aelfir, on the poorest, most downtrodden districts of Spire. Far better, then, to report a cell to the authorities, and gain whatever rewards are offered for doing so – better job prospects, a pocketful of sten, maybe even a nicer flat further up-Spire.

THE MINISTRY WOULD SELL YOU OUT. The Ministry are not your friends. They can't afford to allow you to mess up, or to let information slip – they've invested so much in getting as far as they have today, and their work has barely started. If you get something wrong and it causes problems, the Ministry will quite gladly give you false information and send you into a trap to confuse their enemies.

THE RULES

CORE MECHANIC

When your character performs an action and the gamesmaster asks you to roll, roll a D10 then consult this chart:

1:	Critical Failure (take double stress)
2-5:	Failure (take stress)
6-7:	Success at a cost (take stress)
8-9:	Success (take no stress)
10:	Critical success (inflict +1 stress for each 10 you roll)

If you have the skill you need, roll another D10.

If you have the domain you need, roll another D10.

If you have mastery over the action, skill or domain, roll another D10. (Mastery doesn't stack – you can only use it once per action, no matter how many sources you get it from. You don't need a skill to benefit from mastery when using it, although usually you'll have both.)

You'll use the highest dice result you roll to resolve the action; the other dice don't matter, unless they show 10 and you're inflicting stress on someone else.

Don't roll if there's nothing at stake; if the character could do it, it works, and if they couldn't, they don't. Only roll if the character has something to lose, which is represented by marking stress.

Example: Chris is playing Justine, a supernaturally-beautiful occultist/artist known as an Idol. He describes his character walking into a seedy bar down-Spire, trying to attract the attention of everyone inside. The GM, Alex, reckons this is entirely possible and can't think of anything fun that would happen if she failed, so they describe the crowd turning as one to face Justine as she walks in. A few people stop drinking their beer and nudge their mates.

Chris goes on to say that he wants to track down the informant he's been told hangs out in the bar, and Alex sees that there's something at stake here, so they ask him to roll. He rolls a D10 and gets a 6 – Success at a cost. Alex says that Justine finds the informant, but that their entrance drew some attention from the authorities.

PARTIAL STRESS

Sometimes you're just rolling to avoid taking harm and not trying to achieve anything else in particular – you test to see if you can hang onto your mind after seeing something horrific, to avoid damage from someone taking a swing at you, or to escape from a burning building. On a 6-7 result on such an action, you still take stress, but it's one dice type lower than usual. The same rules apply when you're trying to buy something for cheap.

DIFFICULTY

If an action is difficult, the GM subtracts dice from your pool equal to the difficulty – difficulty ranges from 0 (standard) to 2 (very challenging). Surprise or ambush is a common reason to subtract dice; an NPC's skill level is also represented by their difficulty, which applies to all rolls made against them.

No matter how high the difficulty of a task is, if it's at all possible, you'll always roll at least 1 dice. For each point of difficulty that would take your dice pool to zero or below, the result is downgraded by one step on the core mechanic table above (p9).

For example: A character with a dice pool of 1 attempts a difficulty 2 action. This would leave them with a dice pool of -1. They roll a single dice, cross-reference the number rolled with the table on the page above, and then downgrade the result by two steps. If they roll a 10, this counts as a 6-7 – a success, but one that causes them to suffer stress. Tackling a challenge of this magnitude without aptitude makes success difficult and loss inevitable.

GROUPS

For each character that assists you, if they have a relevant skill or domain, add 1 to your dice pool – but they take stress the same way you would. (There is a limit to how many characters can aid you on any given action, determined by the GM.)

For group skill actions (such as sneaking in somewhere), choose one player to lead the group – if they succeed, every other player rolls with mastery.

STRESS

When you act and something goes wrong, you'll take stress to one of your resistances. There are five kinds of resistance:

BLOOD: Physical damage and exhaustion.
MIND: Mental stress, instability and insanity.
SILVER: Loss of money or resources.
SHADOW: Loss of secrecy, damage to cover identities, police and government attention.
REPUTATION: Loss of social standing in a group or community.

Sometimes it will be stated outright what kind of stress a situation doles out – for example, when a Lajhan casts a spell, most often they'll be asked to mark stress against Mind as they channel the vast energies of their goddess. If it's not clear where stress would go, the GM and the player can work it out together.

Situations inflict stress on players relative to the risk and danger involved; this is determined by the GM. Breaking into a low-rent slum in Derelictus will cause D3 stress on a failure; it's D6 to infiltrate a gung-ho Red Row bar; and it's D8 if you're sneaking into somewhere really important, like the Duke's personal paddle-steamer headquarters in the Docks. If you're fighting someone (or running away from them) and you take stress, you'll usually take stress equal to the amount that their weapon inflicts.

If you are fighting multiple enemies at once and suffer stress, take +1 stress for each enemy after the first.

Each time you take stress, the GM will roll a D10 to see if you suffer fallout; definite, codified negative effects. If the D10 rolls lower than your current total stress, you'll suffer fallout (detailed below).

REMOVING STRESS

You can actively remove stress from your character in one of three ways:

You can lay low to remove all stress suffered, but the plot will move ahead without you, and things will occur that are outside of your control.

You can act to remove stress in a particular category by narratively spending time doing something that would remove stress (i.e. borrowing money from a friend to lower Silver stress, visiting a doctor to lower Blood stress etc). Remove D3, D6 or D8 stress depending on the lengths you go to in order to recover.

You can refresh by acting in accordance with your character's refresh action, outlined by your class or your additional abilities. When you refresh, remove D3, D6 or D8 stress depending on how fully, and how dramatically, you fulfilled the requirements of your refresh action.

Also, suffering fallout reduces the amount of stress your character carries – it shifts from abstract to definite. When you suffer minor fallout, remove 3 stress; when you suffer moderate fallout, remove 5; when you suffer severe fallout, remove 7.

Example: Ana is playing Harold, an aging Lajhan (a priest of the drow moon goddess). Harold's total stress is getting pretty high after evading some city guard patrols – especially his Shadow stress – and Ana has a few options for how to lower it.

Firstly, Harold could lay low, removing all stress from all resistances; the GM decides that this would give the city guard a chance to uncover one of the group's hidden caches of weapons, and it would be confiscated.

Alternatively, Harold could act to remove stress from his Shadow resistance; for example, bribing a sympathetic guard to say he's fled the area, convincing a local bar owner to provide him an alibi, or burning evidence. This

would remove D3, D6 or D8 stress from Shadow, and exactly how much is up the GM.

Finally, Harold could use the refresh action from his class: Help Those Who Cannot Help Themselves. During play, Harold takes great lengths to protect those hurt by the aelfir, putting himself in danger as he does so. As above, this would remove D3, D6 or D8 stress, but it can be removed from any resistance as Harold finds the strength to continue with the rebellion.

KEEPING TRACK

The GM keeps track of the player characters' stress. This has two effects: 1) it makes it much easier to roll for fallout, and 2) it shifts stress from a mechanical effect into a narrative description. When the GM allocates stress to a player character, they should describe what's happening in-world – not just say the number and move on.

If a player wants to know how much stress they're suffering from, the GM can either tell them numerically (which is simple, if a bit boring) or, again, describe it in narrative terms. Rather than saying "You've got 4 stress marked against Mind and Blood each," the GM could say "You can feel your heartbeat ringing in your ears. You taste tin in your mouth. You can't focus on what anyone is saying."

The GM can ask players to keep track of their own stress and roll for their own fallout, but in practice they tend to forget about the second part. It's up to you; we prefer it this way, but it might not work for your group.

ADDITIONAL RESISTANCE SLOTS

Each character will have additional resistance slots against certain resistances determined by their class and their abilities. Stress marked in these additional resistance slots doesn't count towards the character's total stress for the purposes of determining fallout; they're "free." Armour also functions as additional resistance slots for Blood; you can learn more about it in the equipment section (see page 19).

These slots will be described in abilities as "+X [Resistance]," so "+1 Blood" would give you access to an additional slot in Blood that isn't counted towards fallout.

FALLOUT

Each time a player character takes stress, the GM checks for fallout – to see if there's any kind of ongoing, serious effect at play. The GM rolls a D10 and compares it to the current total stress marked against the character's resistances – if the result of the D10 roll is lower, the character suffers fallout. The level of fallout depends on the amount of total stress the character had when the fallout triggered:

2-4 Stress: Minor Fallout
5-8 Stress: Moderate Fallout
9+ Stress: Severe Fallout

Work out what happens based on the type of stress that triggered the fallout; usually that's the resistance type that has the most stress marked against it. If there's a mix, or it's not clear, go with whatever sounds more interesting. You can choose from the list below or make up your own.

Remember: On minor fallout, remove 3 stress; on moderate fallout, remove 5; on severe fallout, remove 7.

If you'd like, you can allocate two fallout results from the category before the one selected instead. (So: instead of being KNOCKED OUT, you can be BLEEDING and PANICKED.) You can also upgrade fallout from one stage to the next if a character

SPECIAL STRESS SITUATIONS

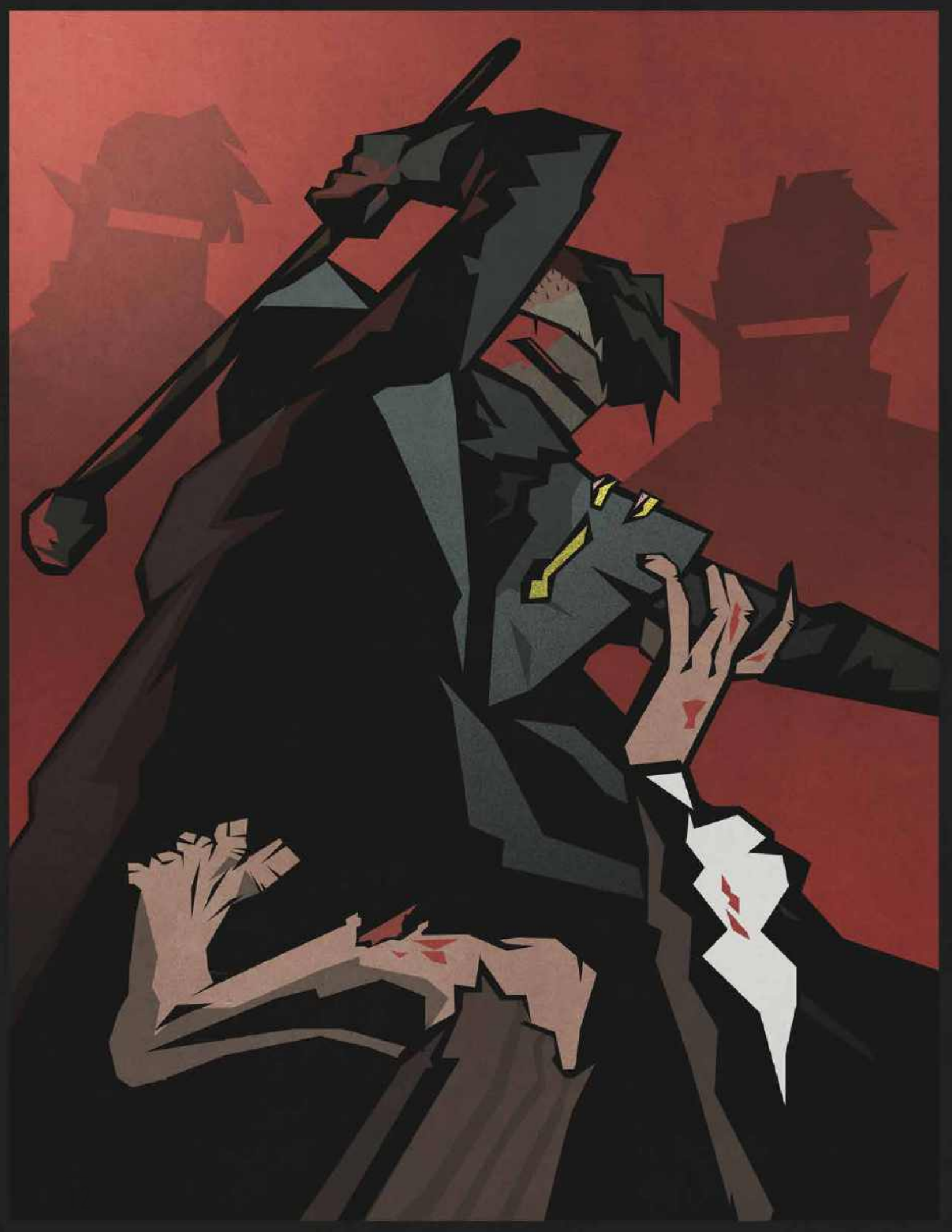
THE CURSE

If a drow is caught in bright sunlight without proper protection, roll Resist or suffer D6 stress to Blood or Mind immediately. If they have the proper protection, it's D3 stress per day. Minor incidental exposure, overcast days, or sunset/sunrise inflicts 1 stress. It's rare for a drow to die of sun exposure unless deliberately restrained or surprised.

MAGIC

There are two kinds of magic: divine, which is sanctioned by a church or temple and uses established rites and ritual, and occult, which hacks into the ambient levels of unknowable energy and rewires them into strange and powerful patterns.

Divine magic doesn't require a roll to cast: you simply mark the stress, roll for fallout, and use the effect listed in the ability description. When you cast an occult spell, make an appropriate roll (usually listed in the ability itself) – if you suffer stress from this action, you suffer D6 stress minimum. (But you might not suffer any stress at all!)



suffers fallout from repeat sources. (So: if a character who's already BLEEDING suffers further minor fallout during the same fight, you can get rid of that BLEEDING and give them a moderate result instead, like BROKEN LIMB.)

You, or an ally, can mitigate Blood or Mind fallout with an appropriate Fix check (see page 17); minor fallout can be removed, but anything moderate or above can only be stabilised and managed unless you receive long-term care. Magical sources can also cure fallout, rather than removing stress: 3 stress to repair minor fallout, 5 stress to repair moderate fallout, and 7 stress to repair severe fallout. (But severe fallout generally isn't the sort of thing that you "cure.")

Non-Player Characters (NPCs) mark stress like players, but they only have one resistance. When an NPC takes total stress equal to their resistance, they flee the situation, drop out of the conflict, or do whatever it is the players want them to do.

LESS LETHAL FALLOUT

As it stands, the system for resolving fallout is pretty lethal. If you'd like to make your game more survivable (or, more accurately, limit the amount of misfortune lumped upon the player characters) then you can treat each resistance as a separate entity when it comes to calculating total stress. (So: if a character has 4 Mind stress and 6 Blood stress and takes another 1 stress to Mind, the GM needs to roll lower than 5 to inflict fallout – the Blood stress doesn't factor in at all.)

MINOR FALLOUT

Minor fallout comprises short-term, low-impact effects.

BLEEDING: [Blood] You're leaking. Until you get proper medical care, each time you make an action, mark 1 stress against Blood before you roll the dice (but don't check for fallout).

STUNNED: [Blood] You take a blow to the head, or are winded, giving your enemies opportunity to act. If they want to get away from you, they can do so while you stagger about and gather your senses; otherwise, you can't use the Fight skill to earn additional dice for the remainder of the situation.

ADRENALINE: [Blood/Mind] Your instincts kick in and you do something stupid. If you're trying to get away or de-escalate, you lash out at your opponents. If you're trying to fight, you get panicked and retreat. This is only momentary, and fades after a moment – long enough for a single, immediate action.

TIRED: [Blood] You struggle to stay awake, and you overlook something crucial in the current situation. The GM works out what it is, and it comes back to haunt you before the session is over.

PANICKED: [Mind] Your heart hammers in your chest. Choose: either leave the scene and calm down, or make things difficult for everyone else around you and increase the difficulty of all actions performed nearby to you by 1.

SHAKEN: [Mind] You can't focus on what you're doing. You may not gain dice from Domains until you take time to calm down.

WEIRD: [Mind] You do something unsettling that bothers normal people – obsessive behaviour, singing to yourself, fulfilling a strange compulsion at inappropriate times. At the earliest opportunity, the GM can declare that your weirdness puts a useful NPC off you (and probably your allies, too). Once this happens, remove this fallout.

LASH OUT: [Reputation] You're pissed off. You immediately lash out at the source of stress, no matter whether or not this is a sensible idea.

LIE: [Reputation] Trying to justify your actions, you tell a lie that will cause a problem this or next session.

COMPROMISED: [Shadow] A friendly NPC asks you to justify your strange behaviour.

RUMOUR: [Shadow] Word of your actions gets around the area. The GM and the other players should work out three statements that are whispered about you in bars and taverns: two true, one false.

DEBTOR: [Silver] During the next session or later in this one, an NPC who lent you money will call in a favour.

PAWNED: [Silver] Until the end of the next session, you lose the use of one piece of equipment that's important to you.

MODERATE FALLOUT

Moderate fallout represents serious problems that are ongoing or acute.

BROKEN ARM: [Blood] Your arm breaks under the strain, and splintered bone juts up through your skin. You can't use the arm until it heals (which will take a month or so, or require powerful healing magic).

BROKEN LEG: [Blood] Your leg bones splinter and crack. You can't walk without crutches for a month or so, and you'll automatically fail any Pursue attempts. Any action where you'd need to be quick on your feet (fighting, dancing, climbing) is either impossible or suffers from an increased difficulty.

KNOCKED OUT: [Blood] You fall unconscious for several hours, during which time your enemies get an advantage.

FREAK OUT: [Mind] You lose it, and attempt to kill (or at least drive off) whatever caused your mental break. You won't calm down until you're restrained, it's destroyed or flees the scene, or you're knocked unconscious.

MEMORY HOLES: [Mind] You did things that you can't quite recall. The GM and every player aside from you work together to determine what you did that you blocked out from your mind while you step outside of the room, or during downtime. These are generally pretty awful things, and they can have happened up to a year ago in game time or immediately upon suffering fallout. Your character has zero memory of the events, but everyone else involved knows what happened.

PERMANENTLY WEIRD: [Mind] As WEIRD, but: it lasts until you get proper treatment, and the GM can trigger it whenever they like. You can suppress the effects of this fallout for a scene by marking D3 stress against Mind.

PHOBIA: [Mind] You acquire a phobia of something related to the stress you suffered – a person, an item, a place, a situation, or something even more abstract. You will avoid the subject of your phobia whenever possible, and if you have to interact with it, difficulties are increased by 1.

HUMILIATED: [Reputation] You make a total fool of yourself. You can't make use of any allies associated with the actions that pushed you into fallout until you prove yourself once more in their eyes.

VENDETTA: [Reputation] During the next session, or later in this one, an NPC from this session will return with a vendetta against you.

ARRESTED: [Shadow] You are caught and arrested by the guard and put in a jail cell, awaiting proper questioning for your crimes.

CRIMINAL: [Shadow] You are accused of criminal acts, whether true or not, and wanted posters featuring your face and name are put up throughout the district in which you committed the crime. If the crime is particularly exciting, your name and face may make it into the papers.

WATCHED: [Shadow] At any point from now until the end of the next session, the GM can decide that someone tailing you watches you perform an action; they can tell you which action if they wish. This will come back to haunt you before long.

SOLD: [Silver] You're forced to sell off something valuable to pay your debtors. Work out with the GM what you're forced to sell.

SERVICES RENDERED: [Silver] You're forced to sell your skills to a third party to pay your debtors, and the work is not pleasant. Work out with the GM what your character doesn't want to do but is prepared to in order to make ends meet.

SEVERE FALLOUT

Severe fallout can mean the end of a character's story – or represent a huge change in it. They are permanent, lasting effects that may have an impact on a character's allies and bonds as well as the character themselves.

CHOSEN: [Blood] You pass out and awaken in a half-dream state before your god (and if you haven't devoted your life to a god, someone else's god) and you can strike a bargain with them in exchange

CREATING YOUR OWN FALLOUT

Feel free to create you own fallout results specific to a particular situation once you've got a handle on the system – this list can't, and shouldn't try to, cater to every potential situation. As a guide, Minor fallout is generally resolved within a day or so; Moderate fallout takes longer, or has minor permanent effects; and Severe fallout can redirect a character arc or introduce an entirely new facet to it.

When you create fallout of your own, it's important to consider the effect it will have on the game. Forcing a player to "sit out" and miss taking part is rarely fun for them; similarly, anything which imposes a flat penalty to all rolls encourages them not to act until the fallout is removed. Try to focus around pushing the story forward instead of punishing the characters and/or players.

for your life. If you accept their terms, you return to consciousness (changed, always changed) and if you don't, you slip away into death.

DYING: [Blood] You're dying. Choose: do something useful before you die (and roll with mastery, because this is the last thing you'll ever do) or desperately try to cling onto life (and lose something vital in the bargain).

OBSESSED: [Mind] Your mind splinters and shards until it is razor-sharp and barbed, focused on a single goal. You are now PERMANENTLY WEIRD (as above), but when you attempt to achieve your goal you roll with mastery, and the difficulty for all other actions increases by 1. Once you achieve your goal, your mind gives under the strain, and you are forcibly retired.

RENEGADE: [Mind] Your mind shattered by the stress of your actions, you turn against the Ministry and all it stands for (the precise reasons why are up to you and the GM). This is not immediate; the fallout represents the first crack in the dam of your mind. Over the next few sessions, play out your descent. Should you survive, you join a rival faction, or become one unto yourself, set against the cell.

REVILED: [Reputation] You are expelled from somewhere important to you, and you can no longer return on pain of death (or, in more civilised society, arrest). People in the district will spread stories of how utterly reprehensible you are throughout the city.

BURNED: [Shadow] The Ministry decides that you are no longer worth the risk of employing, and after feeding you some false information, sells you out to your enemies. Good luck.

WRATH OF THE SUN GODS: [Shadow] Your operations are uncovered by the Solar Guard, the grand inquisitors of the aelfir church, and you are hunted. Many of your NPC bonds are dragged out into the street and shot. Your friends dare not speak your name.

DESTITUTE: [Silver] You are utterly without material resource, and deep in debt to several bad people. You have one last chance to gather up a vast sum of money or resources to pay back your creditors, or you'll end up dead, mauled beyond recognition by loan sharks, or sold off into some Red Row sweatshop.

TURNED: [Silver or Shadow] You have sold out your allies in exchange for massive bribes to get you out of debt, or to lessen your own punishment. You are now working for one of your enemies as well as the Ministry, and you may be asked at any time to perform favours or rat out your team-mates. The only way out of this is to come clean (and be killed by the Ministry), completely eliminate the enemy forces who have leverage on you, or take the next skywhale out of Spire and never look back.

BOND FALLOUT

Bonds are relationships that player characters have with each other or non-player characters; and in the case of NPCs, they can suffer stress and fallout as though they were a Resistance. (In this text, we use "bond" to refer to both the relationship and the person with whom the relationship is shared.) As it's tracked separately from regular stress, NPC bonds get their own section for fallout:

MINOR

MISTAKE: Your bond's actions raise suspicion. Mark D3 stress in Shadow.

DEPLETED: Your bond uses up their resources, suffers an injury, is upset with you, or is otherwise

unable or unwilling to help you out. Next time you ask a favour of them, the difficulty of the task they attempt is increased by 1.

MODERATE

IN TROUBLE: Your bond finds themselves in trouble, and can't be used until the problem is resolved.

LEAK: Your bond unwittingly gives out information that threatens the operation. Mark D6 stress in Shadow.

SEVERE

BETRAYAL: Mark D8 stress in Shadow. Your bond turns against you, although they will not tell you this until it is too late.

MADE AN EXAMPLE OF: Your bond's connection to the resistance is uncovered, and they are made to pay the price. They are dragged into the streets and shot in public after being denounced for their crimes and declared dead.

SKILLS AND DOMAINS

Your character will have access to skills and domains when the game begins, and have the opportunity to gain more through advancement. There are no levels or values in these – you either have them or you don't.

SKILLS

If you possess a skill, when you perform the action associated with the skill, roll another D10 and pick the highest.

COMPEL: When it comes down to it, all success in life can be achieved by getting people to do what you want. Use Compel to persuade, intimidate and charm people in an attempt to get them to see things from your point of view.

DECEIVE: As a minister, your public life is a lie, so it helps to be good at lying. Use Deceive to convince a person of a falsehood, to carry off a disguise, or to falsify documents.

FIGHT: Few people want to get into a fight, but Spire is a dangerous place, and it pays to be able to handle yourself. Use Fight to hurt and kill people (using weapons, or with your bare hands) and to avoid taking damage yourself, as best you're able.

FIX: The city is crumbling from without and within, which means it's a good idea to make do and mend. Use Fix to repair broken people, things and relationships, as well as to build something.

INVESTIGATE: Secrets and information are Spire's primary currency, no matter what the gold-traders tell you, and Investigate can help you find things that other people don't want you to. Use Investigate to examine a scene, situation, or collection of information to come to useful conclusions based on your findings.

PURSUE: Sooner or later, you'll need to get away from the authorities – or chase someone down to stop them telling the truth. Use Pursue to chase someone or something down, and track them if you lose sight of them. Pursue is also used to escape when you're being chased, or to reposition while in dangerous territory.

RESIST: You will face no end of hardships fighting for the Ministry, and those who can endure them are better off than those who can't. Use Resist to withstand pain and exhaustion, act when you're injured, resist torture and keep your wits about you when others would lose their minds.

SNEAK: If no-one knows that you were there, no-one can accuse you of anything. Use Sneak to hide yourself, or small items on your person, from the attentions of others.

STEAL: You can't always afford what you need to fight the aelfir, which means you need to find alternate means of acquiring it. Use Steal to take things that aren't yours, case a joint, disable security measures and fence stolen goods.

DOMAINS

If you possess a domain, when you perform an action related to that domain, roll another D10 and pick the highest.

For example: the Academia domain lets you roll an extra dice when you leaf through old books or take part in a spirited historical debate, for example, but it also lets you roll an extra dice whenever you're in an area associated with learning and higher education. If you've got the Academia domain, you roll an extra dice when you sneak into a library, evade a university porter who uncovered your safe-house, or track a scholar who is on her way to meet her secret contact.

ACADEMIA: Spire has some of the finest centres of learning in the region, and perhaps the known world, if what you consider "finest" covers experimental theology and practical aetherics. The Academia domain covers book-learning, library use, and dealing with the peculiar personalities and miles of red tape that come attached to institutions of higher education.

CRIME: Breaking the law is a popular pastime in Spire, and the Crime domain gives you an edge: it comes with knowledge of who's who, how to carry yourself, how to pick out a mark and how to stay one step ahead of the city guard. Use Crime when you're dealing with criminals – whether investigating them or trying to work alongside them – or in crime-heavy districts such as Red Row.

COMMERCE: Commerce is the domain of buying and selling – some of it is haggling and appraisal, but a lot of it comes down to knowing where to go and who to talk to in order to get a good deal. Commerce districts include the Blue Docks, the North Docks, the Sky Docks and anywhere you can buy or sell things.

HIGH SOCIETY: Many of the aelfir, and those close to them, live in gilded luxury behind strong walls and ranks of guards. Money and how to spend it is a big part of the High Society domain, but more important than money is the indefinable quality known as class. You can have all the money you desire and still not be accepted into the right clubs if you don't know how to carry yourself – and with the High Society domain, you do.

LOW SOCIETY: Most of the city is covered by the Low Society domain – these workers, labourers and craftsmen are the lifeblood of the city. They're also the parasitic and workshy masses, depending on who you ask. Low Society districts include the North Docks, Derelictus, Pilgrim's Walk, the Works, the Garden, Perch and anywhere else people are struggling to survive day-to-day.

OCCULT: The walls of Spire hum with strange energies, and once you dig deep enough into the Heart, reality comes unstuck almost entirely. Any use of magic not sanctioned by a church comes under the Occult domain, as do the secrets hidden in the Heart, other dimensions, or the times of legend in the distant past.

ORDER: This domain encompasses those who keep the peace in and around Spire, successfully or not – the city guard, for the most part, but also the army and the Council themselves. Depending on who a mercenary company works for, and the sort of work they do, they'll either be Order or Crime. Outside of the jail, the military camp and the Council offices, there aren't many districts of Order – they operate in other districts and enforce the will of the aelfir upon the populace.

RELIGION: The city of Spire is a very religious one, with aelfir forbidding very few faiths (although the ones they forbid certainly matter to the dark elves). The Religion domain covers interactions with institutions devoted to faith and knowledge of deities, and rites, of all kinds. Religious districts include Pilgrim's Walk, New Heaven, the Solar Basilica and the cathedral of Our Glorious Lady.

TECHNOLOGY: The humans are the undisputed masters of technology, having vastly accelerated their advancement through a culture of unearthing ancient katakos technology from arcologies in their lands and retro-engineering it to build inferior, but still powerful, copies. The Technology domain covers working with or repairing complex machinery and dealing with groups or guilds that do the same; notable districts where it will come in useful are the Works, parts of the Gardens, and the human-led university of Gywnn-Enforr.

KNACKS

If you possess a skill or domain and gain it a second time, you gain a knack – proficiency with a particular facet of the broad spectrum covered by the skill or domain. Using a knack allows you to roll with mastery but, as ever, you cannot gain more than one dice from mastery per roll.

SAMPLE KNACKS:

DECEIVE

Roll with mastery when you:

- Create forged documents
- Use a disguise
- Impersonate a named individual
- Drop a casual lie into a conversation

LOW SOCIETY

Roll with mastery when:

- In the North Docks
- Interacting with workers
- Blending in as part of Low Society
- Defending the people of Low Society

EQUIPMENT

Equipment, for the most part, lets you do a job. A lockpick lets you pick locks; climbing gear lets you scale a wall; perfume lets you smell like a fancy courtier. Most equipment you use will fall into the above category, and it has no mechanical effect on the game. (Trying to perform a task without the proper equipment can increase the difficulty of the action, or even make it impossible.)

However, when you acquire an item that matters to you, you'll define two things about it that are special which mark it out from the many others like it.

Make a note of one negative aspect and one positive aspect, for example:

- A beaten-up old cart with hidden containers for smuggling
- An itchy rope made by the master rope-weavers of Perch
- A bottle of gutrot liquor that tastes awful, but cleans up old coins to a mirror shine
- A fabulous cloak that provides little to no protection from the elements
- A stout parasol in gaudy, unfashionable colours

If you take advantage of the positive aspect of the item, you roll with mastery on checks where you use it. If you're forced into a situation where you have to rely on the negative aspect of the item, the difficulty of the action increases by 1.

Weapons and armour have slightly more complex rules, detailed below (on page 21). (However, if you don't want to get too in-depth on combat, you can certainly use the above rules for weapons too instead of tags; that's up to your group.)

BUYING AND SELLING

We didn't want to make players count every sten and queen in their pockets, so we abstracted the idea of money (and resources, favours and influence) into the Silver resistance. It's safe to assume that the more additional resistance slots a character has in Silver, the better off they are – but the player characters in Spire aren't ever going to be wealthy, not by the standards of those who oppress them.

To buy items, the GM decides on the cost involved: D3 for minor purchases, D6 for moderate, and D8 for really expensive or exotic materials. Some items just can't be purchased without expending a lot of effort to find a seller and do whatever it is they want (that's worth more than money) to acquire it. Then the player makes a roll; usually Compel+Commerce, but Deceive+Commerce could work if they're trying to pull a fast one.

If the player rolls an 8 or more on their highest dice, their character managed to purchase the item without it causing a big impact on their finances; it costs money, but they have enough to afford it. 6 or 7 means that they take the full stress rolled, but they get the item. Usually, this stress will be applied to Silver.

But what happens when they roll 5 or lower? They still mark stress, but they don't get the item. They might have had to grease some palms to set up a meeting (Silver), or endangered their reputation by organising a buy, only to turn tail and run when the price is too high (Reputation). Maybe the city guard get wind of someone trying to purchase unusual goods and start poking around (Shadow).

As far as selling goes: make a roll to find a buyer, and then remove either D3, D6 or D8 stress from Silver (or Reputation) depending on how valuable the item was.

Players shouldn't have to roll to buy everything they use day-to-day; as with everything else, the gamesmaster should only ask for a roll if something's at stake and it could be interesting if they failed.

WEAPONS

Weapons inflict stress on targets based on their type. Most weapons have their stress dice in brackets after their name, but as a rough guide:

1 Stress: Unarmed damage

D3 Stress: Civilian or improvised weapons – knives, clubs, etc

D6 Stress: Military or professional weapons – swords, guns, crossbows etc

D8 Stress: Heavy or exotic weapons – greatswords, cannon, etc

RANGE

We assume that weapons can only be used up-close unless they have the Ranged or Extreme Range tag. To use melee weapons against an adversary at a distance, who knows you're there and has a ranged weapon, make a roll (probably Sneak or Pursue) to get in range without taking damage.

If you outrange your opponents – as in you are using weapons with the ranged tag and they aren't, or you're using weapons with the extreme range tag and theirs are only ranged – you take a maximum of 1 stress per roll until they are close enough to use their weapons efficiently. For more information on range, see the Combat section, on page 79.

AMMUNITION

If a character has a weapon that requires ammunition (bolts, bullets, arrows, etc) we assume that they have a ready supply of ammunition for it – there's no need to track each individual piece.

TAGS

Weapons may also have tags attached to them that mechanically affect the way they're used. Most tags will only take effect when a player uses the weapon; as a rough guide, if a tag refers to rolling dice, NPCs can't use it. (Tags such as Piercing, though, can be used by both player- and non-player characters.)

Accurate: If the user takes a minute or so to set up the shot as part of an ambush or surprise attack, they roll with mastery when attacking. This is not possible once combat has started.

Bloodbound: Mark D3 stress to Blood to roll with mastery when using this equipment for the rest of the situation.

Bound: You can use Bound class abilities through this weapon.

Brutal: When you roll for stress with this weapon, roll two dice and pick the highest. Multiple instances of the Brutal tag stack; if you managed to get Brutal three times, for example, then you'd roll four dice and pick the highest when inflicting stress.

Concealable: When you attempt to conceal this weapon, roll with mastery.

Conduit: Mark D3 stress to Mind to roll with mastery when using this equipment for the rest of the situation.

Dangerous: If your highest D10 shows a 1 or a 2 when you use this weapon, it has exploded. Take D6 stress; the weapon is destroyed.

Defensive: While using this weapon, you gain an additional Armour resistance slot.

Devastating: You cannot allocate stress inflicted by this weapon to armour, even if it has the Implacable tag.

Double-barrelled: You can use this weapon twice before reloading, or fire both barrels at once to give the attack the Brutal tag.

Extreme Range: This weapon can be used at extreme range.

Masterpiece: This weapon's damage dice increases by 1 step when used by someone with mastery of the Fight skill.

One-shot: You can only use this weapon once per situation – it takes a very long time to reload.

Ongoing Dx: At the end of the situation, a character who took damage from this weapon must succeed on a Resist check or suffer additional stress equal to the Dx value.

Parrying: Once per situation, when an enemy inflicts stress to Blood with you in melee combat, force the GM to re-roll the stress inflicted.

Piercing: You cannot allocate stress inflicted by this weapon to armour, unless the armour has the Implacable tag.

Point-blank: When used at extremely close range, this weapon's damage increases by 1 dice size; at anything over medium range, it decreases by 1.

Ranged: This weapon can be used at range.

Reload: Once you've used this weapon, it cannot be used again until you spend time reloading it.

Scarring: Causes savage, ugly wounds on targets.

Spread Dx: If you succeed on an attack with this weapon, you inflict half the stress you dealt to the original target to a number of other targets standing nearby, equal to the result of your Dx roll.

Surprising: The first time you use this weapon in a situation, roll with mastery.

Stunning: If you succeed on an attack roll with this weapon, you may declare that any affected targets take no stress, but their difficulty is reduced to 0 until they gather their senses.

Tiring: When you fail an action using this item, its damage decreases in dice size by 1.

Unreliable: When you fail an action using this equipment, it cannot be used for the remainder of the situation.

ARMOUR

Armour gives additional Blood resistance slots to a character who wears or carries it, meaning that they can take more hits before succumbing to their wounds. Armour has tags in the same fashion as weapons:

Assault: You may choose to mark 1 stress against this armour; if you do so, you gain mastery to Fight on your next action.

Camouflaged: The armour is designed to camouflage the wearer in specific terrain; when they use Sneak in that terrain, they do so with mastery.

Concealable: When you attempt to conceal this armour, roll with mastery.

Implacable: Piercing weapons do not negate this armour, but Devastating weapons do.

Heavy: When wearing your armour, you may not use the Pursue or Sneak skills to gain additional dice.

MAKING YOUR OWN WEAPONS AND ARMOUR

GM, it's up to you to create the right weapons for your story. While we've listed plenty of examples throughout the book, both as part of the character starting equipment and NPC descriptions, we wanted to let you craft the weapons you need rather than trying to write an exhaustive list of every possible piece of kit in the game.

To generate a weapon or piece of armour, pick out a stress dice for it, and attach as many tags as you like (although more than four starts to slow things down). Feel free to create your own tags, too, especially if they don't have mechanical feedback: Stylish, Terrifying, Flashy, and so on. We've generated a few pieces of equipment below to get you started.

Weapon	Stress	Tags
Blunderbuss	D3	Spread D3, Ranged, Point-blank, One-shot
Poison blade	D3	Ongoing D6, Concealable
Mattock	D3	Brutal, Piercing
Aelfir longbow	D6	Masterpiece, Tiring, Extreme Range
Cat o' nine tails	D3	Scarring, Stunning
Gnollish warhammer	D6	Brutal
Yssian parrying blade	D3	Parrying
Spireblack bomb	D6	Spread D6, Dangerous, Ranged, One-shot
Retroengineered galvanic arquebus	D8	Extreme Range, Dangerous, Unreliable
Solar Guard flashbang	1	Spread D6, Stunning - D6 Stress Versus Drow
Shrike pistol	D6	Piercing, Ranged, Double-barrelled

Armour	Resistance	Tags
Iron spider weave	2	Camouflaged (The Works)
City Guard riot gear	4	Heavy
Minister's prayer	1	Concealable
Boiler plate	2	
The Duke's Greatcoat, Possibly Enchanted	2	Implacable

BONDS

Bonds are connections that the player characters share with other people, groups or organisations in Spire. A bond is a broadly positive connection, if perhaps a complicated one.

GM, give out bonds to the characters as rewards for recruiting allies or achieving objectives.

HELPING OUT YOUR FRIENDS

Once per situation, when you act in a way that benefits someone you share a bond with, you may do so with mastery.

NPC BONDS

You can ask an NPC bond to perform a favour on your behalf – something that they wouldn't normally do and which puts them, and the relationship, under stress and danger. They're under no obligation to do what you ask – and the GM might ask for a check to get them to comply – but if they do so, they incur stress based on the scale of the favour asked.

Treat performing a favour as a normal roll. An NPC bond rolls 1D10, +1D10 if it's within their area of expertise, +1D10 if it's in their neighbourhood/home. If an NPC bond suffers stress when they roll to achieve a task, treat the relationship as a separate resistance allocated to the character and allocate stress to it.

SAMPLE STRESS LEVELS

1 Stress: Give advice or access to general information within their domain; allow safe passage through space they control; offer temporary accommodation.

D3 Stress: Get you and your comrades access to a private area or event; lend you a piece of equipment; put in a good word with an authority in their domain; turn a blind eye to minor transgressions.

D6 Stress: Gift you a valuable piece of equipment; provide a safe haven for you and your comrades; betray the trust of an outsider; turn a blind eye to major transgressions; commit minor transgressions; engage in moderate-risk actions.

D8 Stress: Betray a friend; commit major transgressions; engage in high-risk actions; donate large amounts of resources to the Ministry.

Example: Lozlyn has an NPC bond with Jackson Crouch, a heretical retroengineer who peddles moody galvanics on the streets of Red Row. She asks him to lend her an experimental gun he's been working on for an upcoming raid, and the GM rolls to determine the result of her request. This is within Jackson's area of expertise and also doesn't involve him leaving his home district, so the GM rolls 3D10. Their highest dice is a 7, which means that Crouch entrusts Lozlyn with the gun (for a while) but the relationship takes D3 stress. Crouch grumbles at the imposition, but hands over the gun, and asks her not to break this one.

You can remove stress from a bond by doing a favour for your ally in return; the bigger the favour, the more stress you'll remove.

BOND FALLOUT

Bonds don't count towards your total stress for fallout – they're handled separately, each as their own track. At the end of each session, roll to check for fallout on each bond that a player marked stress to that session. Bond fallout is detailed in the fallout section on page 11.

(If a bond is temporary, such as one earned from a spell or class ability, then roll for fallout when it is removed.)

BOND LEVEL

There are three levels of NPC bonds: Individual, which is a single person; Street, which is a small-to-medium organisation; and City, which is a district-wide organisation with considerable influence.

Example: Catspaw, a Knight of the North Docks, is Individual level; Catspaw's knightly order, The Riddling Pig, is Street-level; the Knights of the North Docks are City level.

A bond's level reflects its overall capabilities, and the scale it works at. The GM and player are encouraged to use their common sense here and judge fairly as to what an organisation of a given size might be able to achieve.

If a bond works against an entity with a lower level than its own, it does so with mastery. A bond can't work against an entity with a higher level than its own, so try to find a level-appropriate entity within it for them to tackle.

Example: If the Order of the Riddling Pig went after a lone spy, they'd roll an extra dice; if they took on a rival pub, it'd be a normal roll; and they don't have the sway to take on the Knights as an entire organisation.

COMBINING BONDS

You can combine two bonds of equal level and similar description to advance them to one bond of the level above. For instance, if you had a bond with Catspaw from the previous example as well as a bond with Moore, a smuggler, you could remove both and replace them with "River Folk" as a Street-level bond. You've still got a connection with both Moore and Catspaw, but the individual connections are less important to you than the relationship with the people who live around the river docks in general.

CHARACTERS

HOW TO CREATE A CHARACTER

To make a player character in Spire, choose a durance from the list on page 26: this is an indication of the sort of thing your character was doing before they joined the resistance. Once you've selected a durance, select a class (they begin on page 28) and two Low abilities from it. Choose a name and bonds, note down your free core abilities, select your equipment from the options provided and you're ready to go.

BACKSTORY

You can determine as much, or as little, about your character's past and personality as you like before play starts – and it can really help to get a thorough understanding of who the character is so you can roleplay them better.

However, we prefer to keep things vague. By defining only broad truths about your character, you give yourself enough basis for roleplay, but also leave things open to interpretation if you want to connect them to other characters and events that might come up during play.

HOW TO ADVANCE A CHARACTER

When you make a small change in the city of Spire, gain a Low advance. When you make a moderate change in Spire, gain a Medium advance. When you cause huge, severe and perhaps irreversible change in Spire, gain a High advance.

The change does not have to be for the better.

Advances are selected from within your class, unless you want to multiclass.

MULTICLASSING

You may, if you wish, select an ability from a different class when you advance, but your advance counts as one grade lower – if you choose to do so, you gain that class's refresh ability as well. You must have a way to learn the ability in-character, too – if you're a Knight and you want to purchase Bound abilities with your advance, you'll need to spend some time in Perch or at least with an existing member of the organisation.

DURANCE

Although the aelfir occupied Spire nearly two hundred years ago, they allow dark elves to live and work in the city in exchange for a durance – four years of indentured servitude to a high elf with enough money and influence to support them. In exchange for those four years of free labour (and dark elves are not permitted to choose how they spend their durance, either), the aelfir in charge is expected to provide food, clothing and shelter for their charge. Given the overcrowded nature of Spire's prisons, a period of durance is a common punishment for a crime – six months for minor infractions, and several years (if not decades) for serious crimes.

There are many kinds of durance: a dark elf whose family is in good standing with the aelfir will treat the durance as a sort of internship or apprenticeship, perhaps setting them up for later roles as paid researchers, artists, military officers or traders. (These drow are often supported by their families during their durance, too, so they can afford to go without pay for four years and not feel the bite of poverty too keenly.)

But the majority of drow are not in good standing with the aelfir, instead being third- or second-generation children of immigrants from Aliquam or the Home Nations who reside in the damned undercity

or the cramped confines of the Works, the Gardens or Pilgrim's Row, and their durances are not so kind. Once they are of age (around sixteen, but children as young as thirteen can be taken in desperate times) they are rounded up by the city guard on Durance Day and herded up-Spire. Here, they will be bargained for, and traded back and forth between monied Lords and Ladies who pay a small donation to the city for each servant under their control.

Not all drow perform a durance; some wealthy drow families "buy out" the young dark elf, making the donation to the city that their aelfir lords would (plus an additional fee, of course), and many of those who live in Red Row or Derelictus are never spotted by, or deliberately hidden from, the guard who come looking for them each year. Those who have hidden from the aelfir live uneasy lives, as the penalty for not serving a durance is exile, or worse.

What do drow under durance do? The Works runs on indentured drow; legions of ashen-skinned, starving labourers, hauling raw materials to furnaces, risking the loss of a limb in whirring machinery or a lung from breathing in atomised spireblack (see page 124). The Garden, save for the few spots owned by independent deep farmers, is attended to by swarms of workers who pluck fruit from the vines and stir the great, still vats of algae. The armies of the Allied Defence Force, though they carry guns of human make and have aelfir leaders, are made up largely of indentured drow soldiers swathed in protective scarves and goggles to keep the sun's light at bay.

Spire would not be the city it is today were it not for the thousands of unpaid workers who toil ceaselessly to keep it running.

Select one of the following durances to represent how you spent your four years of service to the aelfir at character creation – feel free to create your own with the GM if you are interested in an origin that is not represented here. Your domain will give you access to the additional resistance slots, skills, or domains listed after the title. For more information on skills and domains, see page 17.

ACOLYTE: +2 Mind, Religion. You spent time serving as an assistant to an aelfir in the Solar Basilica or researching ancient gods in dusty temples. You have a broad awareness of religious practices in Spire and are used to helping out during casting of ritual magic.

AGENT: +2 Shadow, Crime. You served as a connection between your master and the underworld, doing whatever needed to be done to ensure the success of their business enterprises. You are adept at covering your tracks, and in the know when it comes to the criminal element.

BUILDER: Fix, Technology. You designed and built things for your master – machines, structures, bridges, elevators, and so on. You are well-versed in patching things together and understanding the mysterious inner workings of devices.

DEALER: Compel, Commerce. You bought and sold things for your Lord, striving to get a good price, and are not averse to applying pressure to get what you want. You know the best places to acquire goods.

DUELLIST: Fight, High Society. You put your life on the line, fighting for the honour of an aelfir lord during their debauched festivals, and you survived. You can comport yourself equally well in a swirling melee or a cocktail party.

ENLISTED: +2 Blood, Fight. You were a grunt – a front-line soldier, wrapped in scarves to protect yourself from the sun's light, fighting a war far to the south against the gnolls. You are tougher than most, and can shoot straight.

SLAVERY?

Durance is a form of slavery, albeit a temporary form – although a drow can leave their post after four years of labour, they will find it hard to acquire resources and skills to make it on their own, and often wind up working for a pittance under the very aelfir who had them during their durance in the first place. Even during their durance, a drow is still considered a person, not property.

The topic of slavery – full slavery, where human beings are bought and sold as though they were commodities – is a difficult one to broach, and we're not sure we're equipped to do it. To that end, as far as we're concerned, outright slavery is illegal in Spire the same way murder and theft are. Some people still do it, the same way they do in the real world, but there's not a great industry around it. If you want to explore slavery in your game – and the moral implications of a city that made it legal, as well as an oppressor who explicitly seeks to buy and sell the oppressed – go for it, but that's not a story we're interested in trying to tell.

GUARD: +2 Reputation, Order. You were one of the thousands of drow forced to police Spire. This thankless task gave you a reputation as someone who's useful to know, and a keen understanding of how to cut through bureaucratic red tape.

HUMAN EMISSARY: Technology, Commerce. You dealt with the humans, a strange and short-lived race from beyond the eastern ocean, and grew used to understanding their strange technology before buying it off them.

HUNTER: Pursue, Sneak. You hunted wild beasts around the minarets of the upper Spire; either you aided your master in their hunts for sport, or you hunted alone for their table.

INFORMATION BROKER: +2 Shadow, Investigate. You applied your unique talents for your lord's benefit, buying and selling information, secrets and allegiances to further their political schemes. You have a keen eye for information, and are hard to track down.

KILLER: Sneak, Fight. You murdered the enemies of your lord in cold blood; strangling them with their silken bedsheets, pushing them off gilded balconies, or shooting them in the street. You have an aptitude for death, and going unseen.

LABOURER: +2 Blood, Resist. You toiled in the enormous factories of the Works or the endless fields of the Garden district alongside multitudes of other drow. It made you tough, and instilled a keen sense of rebellion in you.

OCCULTIST: +2 Shadow, Occult. You plumbed the depths of arcane knowledge for your master, risking your sanity by poring over forbidden tomes in an effort to unlock the secrets within. You are used to concealing your activities from the authorities and decoding ancient spells.

PERSONAL ASSISTANT: +2 Silver, Compel. You handled the day-to-day business of your lord, giving you an unusual level of authority and a small stash of embezzled money that has nearly run out.

PET: +2 Silver, High Society. You were kept as an objet d'art, too pretty to put to work, and shown off at parties. You have retained some of the trinkets and cash from your previous life.

SAGE: +2 Mind, Academia. You worked in one of the universities up-Spire, or perhaps in a private collection, understanding and distilling a broad array of topics for your master. You have a wide understanding of the sciences and history.

SPY: Sneak, Deceive. You were employed as a spy, infiltrating societies and guilds to spread misinformation and report back on their activities to your lord. You are adept at lying, cheating, and moving unseen.

Or, you didn't serve an aelfir lord at all, and instead you:

- *Kept a low profile in Derelictus:* +2 Shadow, Low Society.
- *Fought to protect your community:* +2 Reputation, Crime.
- *Led a doomed uprising:* Compel, Low Society.
- *Joined a cult or two:* Religion, Occult.
- *Toughed it out in Red Row:* Fight, Crime.
- *Fell in with a gang of thieves:* Sneak, Steal.
- *Spent your time in jail:* +2 Blood, Crime.
- *Hid in plain sight:* Deceive, High Society.
- *Helped the Ministry wage their war:* +2 Shadow, Resist.

AZURITE

"Everyone has a price. Even you, my Lord."

You are a trader, deal-maker and hustler from the south docks, clad in sacred blue and gold. You are welcome almost everywhere, and have connections all over Spire from previous business deals and debts owed.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: Silver +2, Reputation +2

REFRESH: Carry out a deal that benefits you more than it does the other party.

SKILLS: Compel, Deceive
DOMAINS: Commerce and either High Society or Low Society

BONDS

- You have an individual-level bond with someone who buys, sells, or smuggles things for a living. Name them and what they're most interested in.
- You have a bond with one of the other PCs who you helped out of debt. Say who, and why they got into debt in the first place.

EQUIPMENT

- One set of blue robes, many layers
- A smattering of gold jewellery made of coins from overseas
- Buckler of Azur (Armour 1, also counts as a holy symbol)
- Serious-looking club (D3, Brutal)

Or:

- Three sets of beautiful robes and girdles, each in slightly different shades of blue
- Golden necklaces, nose-rings and bracelets bearing the symbol of Azur
- "Weapon": Bodyguard, D6, Tiring

If you choose the second option, you're protected by an agent under your employ, often to make up for your lack of combat prowess. When you receive this, name and describe your bodyguard and note down two things they hate.

CORE ABILITIES

CUT A DEAL. *You know anyone who's anyone…* Once per session, set up a meet with an NPC who can acquire you pretty much anything available in Spire. It won't be free, though, and odds are they'll want a favour or a cut too.

HEART'S DESIRE. *…And you know what they want.* Once per situation, pick an NPC that you can observe for a while. The GM will tell you what they want most of all right now.

ADVANCES

LOW

GOLDEN TONGUE. [Divine] *You buy fluency in a language from your god.* Mark 1 stress to Silver to speak a language, dialect or slang of your choosing for the next situation. You can't read or write it, but you're pretty much fluent as far as speaking and understanding is concerned.

IGNOBLE TACTICS. *You have mastered the art of standing behind someone bigger than you.* Gain the Fight skill. Your bodyguard, if you have one, gains the Defensive tag.

GOLD-BLOODED. [Divine] *You can buy your way out of anything – even gunshot wounds.* Gain Religion as a Domain. Once per situation, allot stress to Silver when you'd normally allot it to Blood, or vice-versa.

HIDDEN STASHES. *You have dozens of caches hidden within the city limits.* +2 Silver. In addition, once per session, gain a (non-unique, mundane) piece of equipment instantly as you retrieve it from a cache.

THE GOLDEN GOD'S ARCANA. [Divine] *You put a coin under your tongue as payment to Azur, who fills your mind with knowledge.* At the end of the rite, it disappears. Mark D3 stress in Silver to cast this rite; gain access to a Domain that you do not have for the remainder of the current situation.

BUY FRIENDS. [Divine] *You sacrifice a handful of sten, throwing them from the side of Spire, and beg Azur to put in a good word on your account.* Mark D6 stress in Silver and beseech Azur to aid you in a short ritual. Choose an organisation – you are treated as having an individual-level bond in that organisation until the end of the session, as Azur tweaks the golden skeins of fate to make a connection between the organisation and yourself.

GLUTTON'S COIN. [Divine] *You summon a magical coin that curses the holder with insatiable greed.* Mark D3 stress in Silver or Mind. You summon a coin that you imbue with magical power. The first person to touch it other than you will be possessed by a feverish desire to gain as much wealth and items as possible before the next sunrise.

MEDIUM

TRUE BLUE. [Divine] *Blue is a sacred colour to Azur, and Azur protects the faithful.* As long as you're wearing the sacred blue silks of Azur, your clothes provide Armour 2. Mark D3 stress against Silver to increase this to 4 if you perform a half-hour ritual which makes your clothes glitter like golden coins.

DESPERATE BARGAIN. [Divine] *Your god extends their protection to all facets of your life, for a steep price.* Once per situation, after you take stress but before the GM rolls for fallout, you may elect to mark 1 stress to Silver. If you do, the GM does not roll for fallout, and you escape repercussions for now.

GOLDEN QUILL. [Divine] *All languages of the world are known to Azur, and now, to you as well.* As Golden Tongue, but now you can read and write the language, too. Mark D6 stress against Silver to make the change permanent.

ON THE TOSS OF A COIN. [Divine] *When all else fails, you can even the odds.* When you make any action that requires a dice roll, mark 1 Stress to Silver to use this spell. Instead of rolling your standard dice pool, toss a coin. Heads, you get what you want, take no stress, and you look good doing it. Tails, and you suffer a critical failure and double stress.

AZUR'S GRACE. [Divine] *You are a master of the slightly crooked deal, smoothing things over with divine aid.* +1 Reputation, +1 Shadow. Mark D3 stress to Silver to cast this rite; when you do so,

remove D3 Reputation or Shadow stress marked against yourself or an ally.

THE GOLDEN GOD'S GUIDANCE. [Divine] *Azur gifts you and your allies with muscle-memory and training – but not for free.* Choose any skill – you now possess it permanently. In addition, you learn the art of bargaining with your god for proficiency in mortal tasks: you may mark D3 stress in Mind, Blood or Silver to temporarily purchase a skill from Azur. You, or an ally, gain the skill as a class skill until the next sunrise.

BUY LOYALTY. *You drop a handful of jewelry down Azur's well in the Blue Docks and beseech your god to buy you some connections.* As BUY FRIENDS, but the bond in question is Street-level.

HIGH

BUY SOME TIME. [Divine] *It's expensive, but you can buy back a minute of your time.* Mark D8 stress to Silver to cast this spell, which takes effect instantaneously. You travel a minute back in time, and will probably meet yourself from the past depending on how far you've moved over the last sixty seconds. At the end of the minute, you and your past self meld back into the same person as they cast the spell.

(If you stop yourself from casting Buy Some Time, then things get temporally difficult. Each of you marks D8 stress every minute until one or both of you dies.)

GOLDEN HANDSHAKE. [Divine] *Everyone loves you, so long as you buy them something nice.* Gain mastery in Deceive. In addition, you learn the following rite of Azur: when you buy a present for someone, mark D6 stress in Silver to imbue it with Azur's good graces. Once they accept the gift, they'll treat you as a close personal friend until the next sunrise – or until the gift breaks, whichever comes first.

BUY ANYTHING. [Divine] *Nothing is outside of your remit as a master trader.* Gain mastery in Compel. You can now buy or sell anything to or from a willing participant – not just goods and services, but skills, memories, stress marks, injuries, relationships, time, etc. Both parties must be willing to make the trade.

If you mark D6 stress to Silver as part of casting this rite, you can still buy or sell anything – but transfer of property is dependent on terms set out in a contract signed by both parties. If the terms of the contract are broken, the transfer is effective immediately.

BUY POWER. [Divine] *In a secret and shadowed ritual, you make a fire of bearer bonds and sacred incense and breathe deep as Azur sneaks you into high society.* As BUY LOYALTY, but the bond in question is City-level and the spell costs D8 stress to Silver to cast.

BOUND

"Rope, secure me. Armour, shield me. Blade, bleed them dry."

You are an acrobatic vigilante, accustomed to dealing quick and decisive judgement to criminals. You worship the small gods in your armour, your ropes, your weapons, and they take care of you.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: Blood +1, Shadow +2

REFRESH: Bring a criminal to justice.

SKILLS: Fight, Sneak, Pursue
DOMAINS: Low Society, Crime

BONDS

- You have an individual-level bond with a member of the downtrodden underclass. Name them, and name the thing that's most important to them.
- You have a bond with one of the other PCs who you rescued from a dangerous situation. Describe the situation they found themselves in.

EQUIPMENT

- Light leather armour (Armour 2)
- Ceremonial red binding ropes and mask
- Sturdy leather gloves
- Climbing gear and ropes

Either:
- God-knife (D3, Concealable, Bound)

Or:
- God-axe (D6. Bound)

CORE ABILITIES

SURPRISE INFILTRATION. *Nothing can keep you out.* Once per session, insert yourself into a situation where you are not currently present, so long as there's some conceivable way you could get in there.

BOUND BLADE. *You have captured a god and forced it into your blade.* As a Bound, you gain a god-knife or god-axe blade when you join the order, and bind a small god inside it with a bloody and dark ritual. This weapon has the Bound tag, and as such you can use your class abilities through it. You can't use your abilities through another weapon, but if your Bound weapon is lost or destroyed, you can create a new one with a night-long, exhausting rite held back in Perch.

ADVANCES

LOW

THE SECRET OF BINDING. [Divine] *Your rope can form knots that no other person can untie.* Gain Fix as a class skill. In addition, your rope learns the secret of tying itself into permanent forms. When you tie a knot with your own rope, it cannot be undone by anyone but yourself. (Others can still cut the rope, though.)

THE SECRET OF SECOND SKIN. [Divine] *The god in your armour watches out for you.* Once per situation, when you are attacked by an enemy and the GM would roll to inflict stress, you take 1 stress instead.

THE SECRET OF THE CROWD. [Divine] *You can hide in plain sight, so long as there are others around.* +1 Shadow. When you wear your mask and stand in a crowd, you will blend into the background (though not become invisible) unless you do something out of the ordinary to attract attention.

THE SECRET OF FLIGHT. [Divine] *The god bound into your blade can make it soar like an angel.* Your blade gains the following tags: Ranged, Piercing, Reload. (When you reload, go and pick up your blade.)

THE SECRET OF LOOSE TONGUES. [Divine] *Your bottle enchants the liquor inside it, convincing those who drink to share their secrets.* Gain the Compel skill. When someone takes a drink from your bottle, they will feel compelled to tell you about a crime they were involved in, or adjacent to. (You cannot turn this off.)

THE SECRET OF FEAR. [Divine] *You rattle the cage that keeps the god bound in your blade, and it terrifies your enemies.* Mark D3 stress to Shadow; your bound weapon dice size increases by 1 for the next situation.

THE SECRET OF LUCKY BREAKS. [Divine] *Your gods see to it that you're never without small luxuries.* +1 Mind, +1 Reputation. Your bottle always has a little bit of liquor left in it, your crumpled cigarette packet always contains three cigarettes, and your box of spireblack matches always contains one match. (You can't use this ability to give out infinite cigarettes and booze to loads of other people in an attempt to make money; the gods will resent the abuse, and cease to aid you.)

MEDIUM

THE SAINT OF BLADES. [Divine] *You loosen the bindings on the god in your blade, and it thanks you.* Your blade's damage dice increases by 1 step and it gains the Defensive tag.

THE SAINT OF BLOOD. [Divine] *You sacrifice others to the god hidden in your blade.* +1 Blood. In addition, your bound weapon can drink the blood of others and fill you with vigour. Once per situation, when you hit with your weapon, remove D6 stress from Blood.

THE SAINT OF BINDING. [Divine] *Your rope-god dances and twists for you.* Your rope animates as if of its own accord, tripping your enemies. It becomes a weapon with the following stats: Damage D3, Stunning.

THE SAINT OF HIDDEN FACES. [Divine] *To your oppressors, all poor folk look alike; your mask uses this fact, and it will be their undoing.* Gain Deceive as a class skill. Once per situation, you and another character who are both wearing masks may swap places with one another if you are both willing to do so.

THE SAINT OF WAYS. [Divine] *No lock will impede your progress.* Gain the Steal skill. When you wear your gloves and try to open a door, that door is unlocked and unbarred. It works on windows and trapdoors, but not chests, display cases or safes – it only allows access to portals big enough for an adult drow to fit through.

THE SAINT OF LAST STANDS. [Divine] *Your armour-god extends its protection and watches over your comrades.* +2 Reputation. Once per session, declare a room you are standing in as under your protection. While in there, until you leave the room, any stress that your allies suffer to Blood or Mind is reduced by 1 dice size.

HIGH

THE GOD OF SLAUGHTER. [Divine] *The furious god in your blade is barely restrained, and grows more powerful with each new sacrifice.* Gain mastery of the Fight skill. If you inflict Blood stress with your blade on a mortal target, you kill them.

THE GOD OF SHADOWS. [Divine] *Your mask hides you, even from the light.* +2 Shadow. At the start of a situation, you cannot be seen unless you draw attention to yourself by attacking or making a loud noise. You can return to this state by marking D3 stress in Shadow or Blood.

THE GOD OF PERCH. [Divine] *The many gods of Perch smile upon you.* +2 Reputation. Gain mastery in Pursue. You can walk on any solid surface as though it is flat ground, and cannot fall unless you wish to. While in Perch, you roll with mastery on all checks.

THE GOD OF GETTING EVEN. [Divine] *Your armour is a vengeful god.* As SECRET OF SECOND SKIN, but a nearby enemy takes the stress you would have taken instead and you refresh D3.

CARRION-PRIEST

"Charnel feasts tonight, brothers! As do we."

Part of the followers of Charnel – a heretical sect of death worshippers who live atop Spire in the towers and oubliettes of New Heaven – you believe that the bodies of the dead should be eaten by sacred hyenas to ensure the safe passage of their souls to the afterlife.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: Blood +2, Reputation +2

REFRESH: Complete a hunt and take your quarry.

SKILLS: Pursue, Sneak
DOMAINS: Religion, Low Society

BONDS

- You have a street-level bond with the faithful of charnel – a collection of worshippers of the corpse-eater god who live in New Heaven. Name three of them, and what's weird about them.
- You have a bond with another PC who you have helped deal with a death – either by guiding them through the grieving process or disposing of the body. Say who it was, and who died.

EQUIPMENT

- Leathers and robes: Armour 2
- Hyena (see page 38)

Either:
- Heavy-pull crossbow (D8, Ranged, Reload, Unreliable) and Knife (D3, Concealable)

Or:
- War-cleaver (D6) and Preyhook (D3, Ranged, Stunning)

CORE ABILITIES

HYENA. *You have a companion hyena who obeys your commands.* At character creation, pick two commands that your hyena understands. At the start of your turn, choose one command to give to your hyena from the list that it understands so long as it can hear you speak:

SIC 'EM: When you launch a surprise melee attack on a target, your attacks gain the Brutal tag.

SCOUT: When you attack at range from a position of hiding, your attacks gain the Brutal tag.

GROWL: When you intimidate or drive away someone, do so with mastery.

GUARD: When you take stress to Blood, take 1 less stress than the result rolled to a minimum of 1.

FETCH: When you hunt down a target that you can see and hear, do so with mastery.

SCENT: When you sniff around a scene for clues, do so with mastery.

LAY OF THE LAND: *You are a trained hunter, and others would do well to heed your words.* When you enter a dangerous situation, you can name up to three features or opportunities that your allies can take advantage of. The first time you or an ally uses an opportunity, they roll with mastery (for example: cover with a good view of the battlefield, an exit, a badly-guarded door, a stack of barrels, etc).

ADVANCES

LOW

NEW TRICKS. *Your hyena is unusually well-trained.* Gain the Compel skill. Choose two more commands that your hyena understands.

CACKLE. [Divine] *You are a terror of New Heaven, and your enemies quake at your approach.* +1 Reputation. Mark D3 stress to Mind or Body to unleash a nightmarish cackle in concert with your hyena that strikes fear into the hearts of your enemies (and anyone else within earshot). For the next minute or so, if your enemies have a difficulty rating, it is one lower.

MURDER OF CROWS. *The sacred birds of death come to your call.* Mark D3 stress to Mind or Blood to cast this spell, which you must do so with access to a large open interior space, or the sky. You summon a flock of crows, ravens, jackdaws, magpies and all kinds of corvids, who will do your bidding until the end of the situation. They aren't skilled combatants, but they can provide a distraction in a pinch, and you can talk to them in a weird, croaking dialect if you want to ask them to gather information or watch an area.

RIP AND TEAR. *When you corner your quarry, their death is swift.* When you inflict stress in melee combat, re-roll the stress dice if it shows 1. If it shows the maximum number (i.e. 6 on a D6, 8 on a D8), roll it again and add both together.

DEAD FLESH. [Divine] *You are well-liked amongst the slums of New Heaven, as you are able to make rotting food edible once more.* +2 Reputation. You can call upon Charnel to bless rotting or spoiled food, casting the decay out of it, and making it safe to consume, as a five-minute ritual.

CHARNEL'S MARK. [Divine] *You channel the energies of the God of Slow Death through your body and onto your foes.* Mark D6 stress to Blood or Mind to cast this spell on a target within sight; a rune daubed in rapidly-drying blood appears on their person. Until the end of the situation, you and all allies gain the Brutal tag when you roll to inflict stress against them.

MEDIUM

GHOST SPEAKER. *Your connection to the World After is strengthened through Charnel.* +1 Mind, +1 Reputation. You have a close connection to death and the afterlife. Take D3 stress in Mind or Blood to activate this power for a situation – you can see, speak to, and physically interact with ghosts as though they were physically present in the scene. In addition, once per session, you find a ghost and talk to them about the present situation – ask the GM who it is.

RED FEAST. [Divine] *You can eat of the dead as a sacrifice to the Laughing Death, who eases your sorrows.* Communing with Charnel, you can transmute the flesh of sentient creatures into your own at a cost of your own sanity. When you eat the flesh of a person, Refresh. You cannot use this action to remove Mind stress.

MASSACRE. [Divine] *You, or an ally, become a conduit for Charnel to enter the world through blood and*

death. Mark D3 Blood stress and spend an hour sanctifying yourself, or another, in service of Charnel to cast this spell. Each time you mark stress to Blood, every weapon you carry gains the Spread D3 tag so long as it does not possess the Reload tag. This effect is cumulative, increasing the value of Spread by an additional dice size each time you mark stress to Blood. This effect lasts for one situation.

ALPHA. *You hold great power over your sacred beast.* +1 Reputation. At the start of your turn, choose two commands for your hyena to obey.

FORM OF THE CORVID. *You can shift your form into that of a lesser carrion-eater.* +1 Shadow. Mark D6 stress to cast this spell. You channel Charnel's power through your body during an hour-long ritual, during which time you dress yourself in a cloak of black feathers you have made yourself. At the culmination of the ritual, you take the form of a slightly larger-than-normal corvid (the specific type is up to you). While in corvid form you can use your skills and domains as usual, but the fact that you are a bird will limit their application somewhat. You certainly can't use weapons in combat.

You will return to your normal form at the next sunrise, or when someone speaks your full name within earshot – whichever comes first.

RED OF BEAK AND TALON. *Your crow-servants are as fierce and murderous as you are.* As MURDER OF CROWS, but the swarm of corvids count as a (D3) weapon with the Ranged and Brutal tags. (You don't need to purchase the MURDER OF CROWS advance to take this.)

HIGH

BLOODHUNT. [Divine] *Once you've tasted blood, you are all but impossible to stop.* To activate this power, taste a target's blood and mark D6 stress to Blood. Until you sleep, or until they die, you may step out from the shadows nearby to them whenever you desire. They can protect themselves, give or take, by eliminating all nearby shadows.

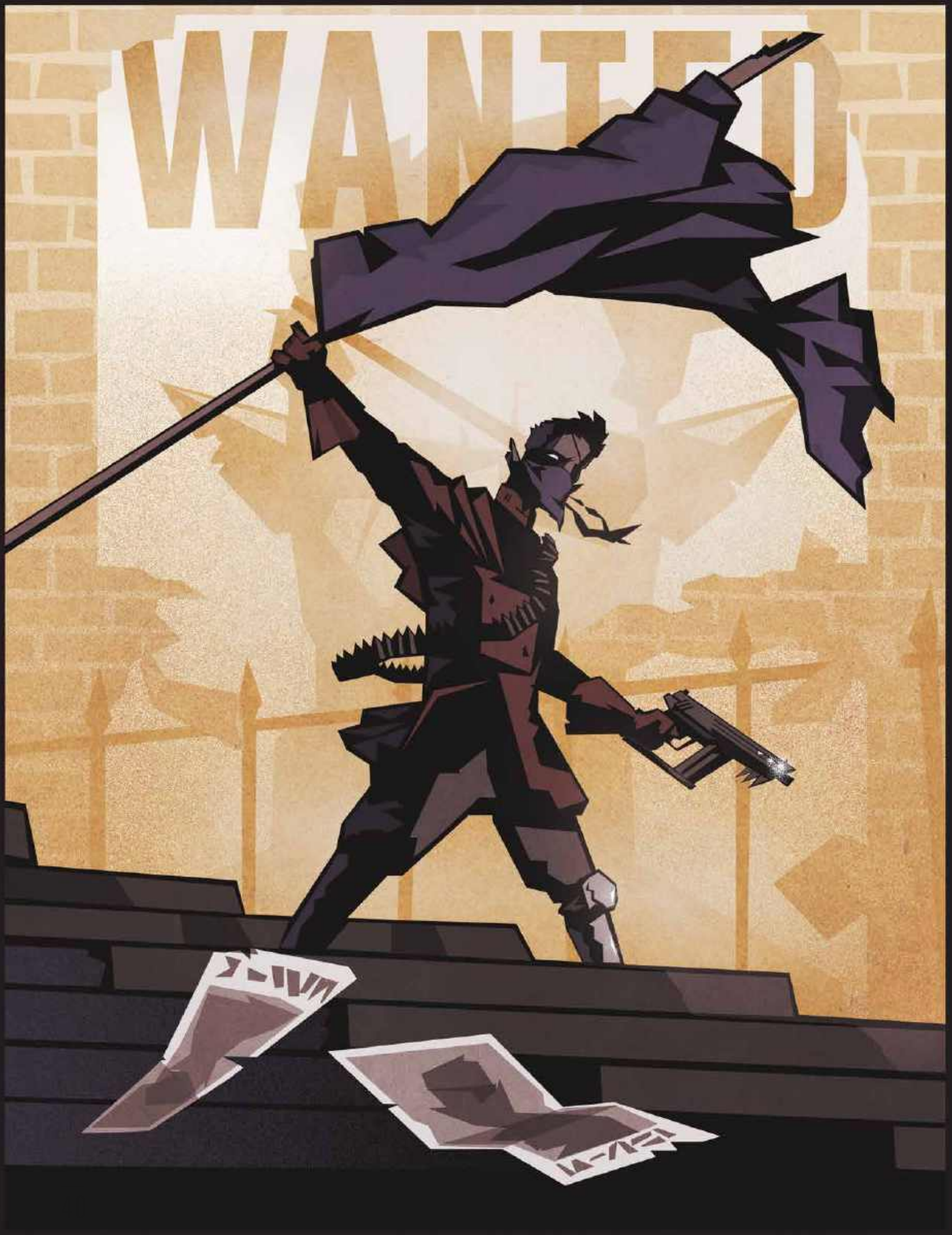
A FLOCK OF NIGHT-BLACK TERRORS. *The crows you summon are Charnel's chosen.* As RED OF BEAK AND TALON, but the swarm counts as a (D6) weapon with the Extreme Range, Brutal and Bloodbound tags. (You don't need to purchase the MURDER OF CROWS or RED OF BEAK AND TALON advances to take this.)

TASTE LIFE. [Divine] *Dead flesh contains many secrets, and you can unlock them in concert with your god.* +2 Blood. When you eat the flesh of a recently dead creature, Charnel sends you visions regarding their life. You can learn their identity, how they died, and their recent actions up to the moment of their death. In addition, you gain permanent access to one domain they possessed when they were alive.

FORM OF THE GREAT CARRION-EATER. [Divine] *You fuse with your sacred beast, becoming a divine monstrosity in service of Charnel.* Charnel blesses you with the ability to change your body into that of a monstrous, slavering hyena. Mark D6 stress to Mind: this is an extended process that takes about 30 minutes to complete, and includes ceremonial eating of flesh and communing with the spirit of your animal companion as well as donning a sanctified hyena-skin. During this process, you will physically merge with your hyena companion, so you can no longer issue them commands until the spell is ended.

You will assume the form of an unnaturally large and muscled hyena for a day, during which time you will be unable to speak intelligibly, but roll with mastery on Fight and Pursue checks. While you are transformed, you gain an additional 5 slots in Blood, and your claws count as D8 damage weapons, but you cannot use weapons, armour or other equipment.

You cannot return to your humanoid form until the spell wears off – you cannot end it early.


WANTED

FIREBRAND

"They can't take us all on. Not all of us. Tonight, we show them who's really in charge."

You are a revolutionary, a rabble-rouser, a dangerous criminal in the eyes of the authorities, who hangs out in the lawless undercities of Red Row and Derelictus. As you gain power, the people of the city begin to worship you, and you can bestow blessings on them by focusing their belief through your actions.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: Reputation +3, Shadow +1

REFRESH: Take something back from those who would oppress you.

SKILLS: Compel, Steal
DOMAINS: Low Society, Crime

BONDS

- You have two individual-level bonds with folk who are sympathetic to your goals. Pick two domains, and create an NPC bond for each of them.
- You have a bond with one of the other PCs who you recruited to the cause. Say who, and say what it was that tipped them over the edge.

EQUIPMENT

Either:
- Knife, sap, or brass knuckles (D3, Concealable)

Or:
- Sledgehammer or pickaxe (D6, Tiring)

And either:
- Crow-pattern revolver (D6, Unreliable)

Or:
- Buzzard sawn-off (D6, Reload, Point-blank)

CORE ABILITIES

LEAD FROM THE FRONT. *You excel when you're under pressure.* When you have 6 or more stress in Shadow, gain mastery on all actions.

DRAW A CROWD. *You can pull together a crowd at a moment's notice.* Once per session, you can draw a crowd to you in a matter of minutes. People will stop what they're doing, so long as it isn't life-or-death, and listen to what you have to say.

ADVANCES

LOW

FIGHT THE POWER. *You channel your anger into fighting the police, soldiers, the solar guard – anyone who'd stand against you.* Gain the Resist skill. When you engage in violence against an enemy who is part of the Order domain (city guard, military, etc) you do so with mastery.

NOBLE SACRIFICE. *You convince your allies to pay for victory in blood.* Gain the Fight skill. If you spend a few minutes getting everyone pumped up before a battle, you and all your allies gain the Bloodbound tag on any weapon you use.

FORCE OF PERSONALITY. *There's nothing you can't do. Honest.* Gain the Deceive skill. Once per session, declare you possess a Domain or Skill that you don't actually have – you are treated as having access to it until the end of the situation. Your natural bravado and charisma are enough to carry you through, even with your lack of applicable knowledge.

ALWAYS OUTNUMBERED, NEVER OUTRUN. *You are exceptional at getting the hell away from your problems.* Gain the Pursue skill. When you flee a superior force, you do so with mastery.

BROTHERS IN ARMS. *You inspire your comrades to greatness and demoralise your foes.* Once per situation, when you and an ally are fighting side-by-side, declare you're using this ability. The next time both of you roll a Fight check, both you and your ally can either increase your stress dice by 1 size or decrease the enemy's stress dice by 1 size – choose before you roll.

GODDESS' CHOSEN. [Divine] *You fight for the people, and Limyé smiles upon you.* Gain one low-level advance from the Lajhan class.

MEDIUM

ME AND THIS ARMY. *You can cause a riot whenever you need one.* +1 Reputation. Mark D6 stress to Shadow or Reputation and spend fifteen minutes getting a crowd of people riled up to turn them into an angry mob on the hunt for blood and justice. You can direct them against a particular target – or try to get them to perform a particular basic action – during the speech, but once you fire them off, the situation is out of your hands.

THE PEOPLE'S CHAMPION. *You are the rock around which the rebellion is anchored.* +1 Reputation. You gain a street-level bond based on the cadre of revolutionaries that follow you around, espouse your virtues and (if you've written any) hold up your manifestos as intellectual principles for life. When you ask this bond for a favour, the stress dice is one size smaller than normal.

SCAPEGOAT. *Your ability to shift blame is legendary.* +1 Shadow. Once per session, when an NPC accuses you of wrongdoing, you can automatically convince them that you're entirely innocent and someone else (choose who) is responsible.

MAKE AN EXAMPLE. *Your fighting style terrifies your enemies.* +1 Blood. Your attacks gain the Brutal tag. In addition, if you take someone out of action in combat, the gruesome spectacle inflicts D3 stress on any other enemy that sees it happen.

FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES. *You know the secret gestures and signs that mark a revolutionary.* Once per session, make an Investigate check against an NPC. If you succeed, you uncover evidence that they are allied to the revolution in some way.

UNTOUCHABLE. *You take any measures to survive, and thus the revolution will survive.* Once per scene, if you suffer Blood fallout, mark D3 stress to Mind and transfer the fallout to a non-enemy NPC who's in the scene instead. Whether they willingly sacrificed themselves or you managed to get behind them in time is up to you.

HIGH

MY NAME IS LEGION. [Divine] *You channel the adoration of the masses, and use that power to transform into a whole crowd of people.* Gain mastery of Low Society. Mark D6 stress to cast this spell. You transform into a great crowd of citizens – part illusion, part simulacrum and part real people who got caught up in the mix. You don't have control over the whole crowd, but you can "possess" anyone in the crowd and take over their actions (and therefore attempt to direct or manage the mob). You can't take Blood stress in this form, but the individual parts of the crowd sure as hell can.

The spell lasts for an hour or so, or until the crowd is broken apart by outside forces.

THE MEANS OF DESTRUCTION. [Divine] *Your touch becomes anathema to your oppressor.* Mark D3 stress to cast this spell. Any improvised weapon you touch (eg. work tools, bolt-cutters, kitchen knives, crowbars, etc) inflicts D8 stress when used against your oppressors for the remainder of the situation, and gains the following tags: Brutal, Devastating.

IRON WILL. *You know that your path of action is right and good, and nothing can sway you from your course.* +3 Mind. Gain mastery of Resist. In addition, once per situation, when you would take stress to any other resistance, you can allocate it to Mind.

YOU CAN'T KILL AN IDEA. [Divine] *To carry on the fight, you hide within the very concept of rebellion until you can strike back.* You can cast this spell instantly – often as a reaction to someone attacking you or uncovering your hideout. It costs nothing to do so.

You transform into the idea of revolution, of hope and resurgence, and your mortal form dissipates into shadow. You become a song; a mantra; an image; an icon. Wherever that idea is spread and believed in, you retain a sort of awareness. This action counts as laying low, so all stress is removed from your resistances. While you are in the form of an idea, you can influence the world around you through your bonds (although you do so on a semi-mystical level).

When you choose to reform – which must be at least a week from when you changed – mark D8 stress as you coalesce out of the shadows to lead your people once more.

IDOL

"Truth? What is truth, when you have beauty?"

You are a beautiful artist and revolutionary, and your creations can reshape the world through bleeding-edge, half-understood sorcery.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: Silver +1, Mind +1, Reputation +2

REFRESH: Someone feels deeply moved when they witness your art.

SKILLS: Deceive, Compel
DOMAINS: High Society, Occult

BONDS

- You have a street-level bond to your adoring fans. Name three of them, and what the group is most excited to see next.
- You have a bond with another PC who you know has feelings for you, even if they wouldn't admit it. Describe the moment when you knew for definite.

EQUIPMENT

- Several sets of flattering clothing
- Tools to create or perform your chosen art
- Small gifts and trinkets from your fans
- A knife (D3, Concealable)

CORE ABILITIES

LIFE AND SOUL OF THE PARTY. *People flock to be near you.* Once per session, so long as there are people nearby and a place to have it, you can create an instant gathering with dancing, games, drinking, eating and chatting. The party gives you mastery to persuade, deceive, or distract actions performed within it.

GLAMOUR. *Black magic and poise let you become whoever they want you to be.* Once per situation, choose an NPC. Using a cocktail of charm, practiced poise and semi-legal black magic, you change your appearance to represent their ideal partner. You don't get to determine what this looks like – it's entirely reliant on the person you're targeting – and you can end the spell by scrubbing off whatever makeup you've applied and spending five minutes in front of a mirror remembering what you look like.

Whatever your target prefers, you'll always look like you. If they're obsessed with tall people, you'll look taller; if they like aelfir, you'll look as though there's some aelfir blood in you; if they're mad about one particular person, you'll resemble them (but not enough to, say, pass as them).

ADVANCES

LOW

CENTRE OF ATTENTION. *When you stride into a room, people take notice.* Gain +1 Reputation. Roll with mastery when you attempt to get everyone in a situation to focus on you and you alone. In addition, describe three incredible outfits that you now own.

GRACE. *You try not to sully yourself with failure.* You move with such precision that fate herself gives you a lucky break now and again. Once per situation, when you make a dice roll and one or more of the dice shows 1, you can re-roll the entire pool.

WHO ARE THEY? *You are enigmatic in the extreme.* +1 Reputation. In addition, the first time you meet someone who doesn't know your name, you roll with mastery to Deceive or Compel them. Once they know your name or see you for a second time, the spell is broken.

MAJESTY. [Occult] *You become so beautiful that none would dare raise a hand against you.* Gain +1 Silver. To cast this spell, anoint yourself with pigments and regal jewelry. Make a Compel+Occult roll: if you succeed, for the next minute or so, you cannot be the target of attacks until you make an attack yourself. People can still block your path, but they can't grab or attempt to restrain you until the spell is broken.

DISHARMONY. [Occult] *You turn your enemies against each other with whispered curses.* Make a Deceive+Occult roll and pick a target that can see and hear you. On a success, they will immediately inflict stress on their nearest ally equal to whatever weapon they're holding (if any), believing them to be an enemy. If they don't have an ally nearby, this spell doesn't have any effect on them.

INSTILL EMOTION. [Occult] *Your art drives others to excess.* If you succeed at a Compel+Occult check when you perform or exhibit your art for an hour or more, you may drive a receptive crowd into one of the following: debauched excess, utter sorrow or mind-numbing ecstasy. You can't direct them past this.

INCORRUPTIBLE. *Your mind is crystal, shining and pure, and madness rolls off you and onto others.* Once per situation, when you take stress to Mind, a different nearby character (chosen by the GM) takes it instead.

MEDIUM

BEAUTY IS TRUTH. [Occult] *Your art carries potent subliminal messages.* You can bind a concept into a piece of art you create to implant a suggestion into the minds of everyone who views it. Make a Compel+Occult check to create or perform the piece. On a success, anyone who views the art has the suggestion implanted in their minds, but they're not entirely sure where it came from.

UNTOUCHABLE. *Your glamered form is so perfect that bullets spatter off it like rain.* +1 Mind. You are so impossibly beautiful that few people can bring themselves to touch you, let alone harm you. You gain armour 3 so long as your beauty is on show.

SPITE. [Occult] *With a glance, you crush an enemy's sense of self-worth and they lash out at their own body.* You assault an enemy's mind with raw

humiliation, and they attack their own body out of shame. They must be able to see you for this spell to take effect. Roll Deceive+Occult; on a success, they mark D8 stress (Piercing) against themselves if they are carrying a gun or edged weapon, and D6 stress (Piercing) if they have a blunt weapon or are unarmed. If they survive the attack, they will remember you.

KILL FOR ME. *You can push people far past their limits.* +2 Reputation. NPCs you share a bond with will perform any task for you, no matter how immoral or depraved – all you have to do is ask.

PAINT WITH BLOOD. [Occult] *To you, even death is an art form.* Any weapon you wield gains the Conduit tag. When wielding a melee weapon, you may use Compel+Occult to attack.

RENDER UNTO ME. [Occult] *The world is yours for the taking.* Once per situation, you can command an NPC to hand an item they're carrying over to you, and they must obey.

HIGH

TRUTH IS BEAUTY. [Occult] *Your art is so powerful that reality cannot stand against it.* +1 Mind. Roll Deceive+Occult and create a piece of art that embodies a suggestion; this process takes about a week. If you succeed, the suggestion becomes true as the world bends and twists to accommodate it. (The more outlandish the suggestion, the higher the stress inflicted on the caster.)

HAPPY TO HELP. *Everyone wants to be your friend.* +2 Reputation. Once per situation, declare that a target who can see and hear you becomes an individual-level bond until the end of the session. At the end of each session, make one of these temporary bonds permanent.

SOUL'S PORTRAIT. *You portion off the ugly parts of yourself into a cursed work of art.* You craft an image of yourself – or something more abstract that you relate to yourself – that acts as a conduit for all your sins and physical ailments. While the artwork is intact your face cannot be marred in any way, you will not age, you will stay beautiful, and any injuries you suffer will not be visible to all but the most thorough examinations. In addition to this, while the artwork exists, gain 3 additional resistance slots in both Blood and Mind.

Each time you mark stress in your additional resistance slots your image in the portrait becomes more haggard-looking and decrepit. Should the painting be destroyed, or should you ever look upon the painting once it is complete, you will immediately suffer Moderate fallout. If the painting is destroyed, it will appear near to you (on your wall, through the post, on billboards, etc) and it will mock you until you die.

OTHER ART FORMS

Your soul's portrait doesn't have to be a portrait, or even a piece of physical art; it could be a play, or a song, or a set of dance steps. It must be performed regularly for it to work, and the more stress you place upon it, the more deranged and perverse it will become.

PERFECTION. *You are the embodiment of perfection, striding through the world unburdened.* You are utterly, mind-destroyingly perfect; bad luck and misfortune rolls off you like rain off a slate rooftop. Gain two additional slots in every resistance.

KNIGHT

"I swear to Our Lady, this hangover could bring down a skywhale. Did we win?"

You are a member of an ancient order of knights who were given the right to police the northern river docks of Spire. Over the centuries, your order has splintered and become ever more corrupt, and now you are little more than heavily-armoured gangsters with a penchant for organised fighting tournaments.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: Blood +1, Silver +2, Reputation +1

REFRESH: Engage in reckless excess.

CLASS SKILLS: Fight, Compel
DOMAINS: Low Society, Crime

BONDS

- You have a individual-level bond with your squire – a young dark elf serving you with an eye to becoming a Knight themselves some day. Name them and say whether they're idealistic or cynical about the whole affair.
- You have a bond with another one of the PCs – you and them used to go drinking, and still do on occasion. Describe the wildest thing you two got up to on one of your legendary nights out.

EQUIPMENT

- Knight Quarter-Plate (Armour 3, Heavy)

And either:
- Greatsword (D8, Tiring)

Or:
- Sword (D6) and Grackler Pistol (D6, Brutal, Ranged, One-shot)

Or:
- Knightly Lance (D6, Piercing, Surprising)

CORE ABILITIES

PUBCRAWLER. *You bear an encyclopedic knowledge of where to get drunk.* Once per game, name a nearby bar, pub or inn where you know the landlord (whether they like you or not is up to the GM).

PICK A FIGHT. *You've spent many an evening sizing up the other patrons in search of a decent brawl.* Once per situation, ask the GM who is the best person in the surrounding area to pick a fight with on one of the following conditions: 1) you want to win 2) you want to make a good impression 3) you want to cause a distraction.

LAW OF THE DOCKS. *You carry a mighty weapon.* As a Knight, you are permitted to carry a large bladed weapon (or a lance) without getting in trouble with the city guard. Using it is another matter.

KNIGHTLY ORDER

As a Knight, you will be pledged to one of the following orders, all of which coincidentally happen to own at least one pub named after themselves: *The Questing Cock, The Drowned Sailor, The Thirsty Maiden, The Wolf & Hound, The Kraken Bell, The Fiendskin Tome.* (Or: make up your own order.) You will expected to perform quests on behalf of your order (light extortion, hustling, bodyguarding), and refusal can lead to your expulsion and loss of your right to carry a large, bladed weapon.

ADVANCES

LOW

CAROUSE. *You make the best friends when you're drunk.* +1 Blood. When you get drunk with someone, you gain an individual-level bond with them until the next day.

JOUSTER. *You are adept at running hard into dangerous situations.* Gain the Pursue skill. You are experienced in the art of high-speed combat; when you charge in recklessly, your attacks have the Brutal tag.

BRAGGADOCIO. *You are an accomplished liar, especially when it comes to exaggerating your own abilities.* Gain the Deceive skill. Once per session, automatically convince an NPC that you can achieve something (whether or not you're able to do it is immaterial).

KNIGHT-ADMIRAL. *You have achieved a high rank, and thus command a portion of the fleet.* +2 Reputation. Your order bestows upon you a mighty mount – a rowboat. Name it. In addition, pick one: it's fast; it looks good; it has a swivel-gun on the prow (D6, Ranged, Reload); it doesn't leak much. Seats six (all of them rowing).

BULWARK. *You and your armour share a special bond; it looks after you, you look after it.* Once per session, clear all stress marked to your armour.

KNIGHT-PROTECTOR. *You are adept at throwing yourself into trouble to save your friends.* Once per situation, when a nearby ally would take Blood stress from an enemy attack, you take it instead.

THE CROWD GOES WILD: *You're used to fighting with the support – or ire – of the crowd to keep you going.* When you have a crowd watching you, your attacks have the Brutal tag. In addition, when you win a fight in front of a crowd, refresh.

MEDIUM

ARMOUR-KENNING. *You know that your armour is not just for show.* When you wear armour, you increase its value by 1 point until you take it off. Also, as you know just where to hit people who are trying to protect themselves, any weapon you carry has the Piercing tag.

RACONTEUR. *You know precisely when to get a round in.* As CAROUSE, but it works as a Street-level bond, because you get drunk with their mates as well.

BRING IT ON. *You are used to being outnumbered in fights.* Any weapon you carry (including your bare hands) that does not possess the Ranged tag gains the Spread D3 tag.

DIRTY FIGHTING. *You have a wide variety of dirty tricks.* Once per situation, when you inflict damage on an enemy, you reduce their difficulty to 0 until they get away from you and catch their breath.

DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM? *You possess a bulletproof reputation.* Gain +1 Reputation. Once per situation, when you take stress to any resistance other than Reputation, allocate it to Reputation.

RIGHT PLACE, WRONG TIME. *You have an almost supernatural ability to get into fights that make your life more interesting, even if they make it a lot shorter at the same time.* Add the following condition to your PICK A FIGHT ability: 4) you want to advance your current objective. You and the group will definitely get a lead or an angle out of the fight, but you have to win it first (or maybe just get out intact).

LAW OF THE LAND. *You are, technically, an officer of the law.* +1 Silver. Gain access to the Order domain. You are sworn in by the Duke herself as a protector of the Docks; when you attempt to de-escalate a situation, you do so with mastery. You can also arrest people, if it takes your fancy.

HIGH

All High-level abilities for the Knight focus around one or more quests. The precise nature of the quest should be worked out between the GM and the Knight's player, but they should be a) difficult and b) achievable. Quests will reflect the nature of the Knights that you have established in your game; they might be doing their best to be chivalrous, or entirely self-serving.

FORTRESS PLATE. [Quest] *You begin the forging of the renowned fortress plate.* +1 Reputation. When you take on the quest, you are tasked by your superior in the order (or the Duke) to perform certain feats of courage and chivalry (or stealing a load of diamonds, whatever needs done that day); for each minor quest you complete, pick one of the following upgrades:

- Remove the Heavy tag from your armour
- Add the Implacable tag to your armour
- Increase your armour's value by 2
- When you receive Blood fallout whilst wearing your armour, you inflict stress on all enemies standing close to you: D3 for minor Blood fallout, D6 for moderate, and D8 for severe

You cannot pick the same upgrade twice. By the end of your last quest, you will have upgraded your armour to be a suit of the finest full-plate, adorned (by yourself or others) with inscriptions and images of your glories, some of which may even be true.

PULL THE SWORD FROM THE STONE. [Quest] *You travel in search of a legendary sword.* When you accept this quest, you gain the Resist skill and Occult domain as you are ritually branded or tattooed with symbols of chivalric protection. You must journey to the centre of Spire, find St Beneferas' sword, and pull it from the floorboards of The Stone (a pub) into which he plunged it hundreds of years ago.

When you complete this quest, you gain a (D6, Brutal) magical sword; as it's magical, you can use it to attack ethereal creatures or those which are immune to normal weapons. In addition, choose two of the following upgrades to the sword:

- Inflict D8 stress
- Gain the Ranged tag
- Gain the Stunning tag
- Gain the Defensive tag
- Gain the Bloodbound tag
- Gain the Devastating tag

And one of the following "upgrades":

- Demons and ghosts are drawn to the sword's powerful energies
- The sword whispers eerie truths
- The sword glows blue in the presence of… something, you're not sure, seems important though
- You know in your heart that you are the true monarch of Spire

SLAY THE DRAGON. [Quest] *You attempt to slay death itself. You are anointed with the legendary Spirit of St Beneferas, an impossibly-strong liquor distilled by a blind madman on retainer to the Duke.* Combined with the proper devotional rites, you change – your touch heals the sick and binds wounds shut. Once per situation, you may remove D3 Mind or Blood stress on any character other than yourself.

You accept a quest to venture to the Heart of Spire, find the nightmarish Dragon pub, and slay the vile guardian that dwells there. Upon completion, the blight that the Dragon spreads holds no dominion over you. Disease and poison no longer affect you. Your very presence, in fact, causes plagues to cease and the sick to recover at an accelerated rate. At the start of each situation, remove 1 Blood stress, and: you can no longer die.

SEEK THE GRAIL. [Quest] *The memory of St Beneferas calls to you, and you set out to become his successor.* You take on a quest to find The Grail, a legendary pub that is said to lay beneath the silt of the North Docks. There you will find St Beneferas, patron of the Knights, and share a drink with him.

When you accept the quest, you are Seen by Damnou, the dark elf trinity of goddesses, and she/they will protect you. Once per session, when you suffer fallout, you can choose to ignore it.

Upon completion, St Beneferas bestows upon you the duty of ruling the Knights, finally passing on his duties. As he was a washed-up drunkard, eternally trapped under the river waters, the North Docks and the Knights therein have come to represent him – degenerate and almost useless. Now, as the you accept the helm of St Beneferas, the docks will change to resemble you instead – both for good and for ill. (This doesn't count as a high-level change in and of itself, so you can't use it to earn another high-level advance.)

Gain the city-level bond NORTH DOCKS.

LAJHAN

"Our Lady protects, sweetness. Hold her in your heart and she will soothe your passing."

The Lajhan, or "silvered," are the chosen of Our Glorious Lady, the light side of the moon, whose light does not burn the drow as the sun's rays do. Lajhan serve her and spread her wisdom throughout Spire, providing aid and nourishment to the impoverished drow.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: Mind +2, Reputation +2

REFRESH: Help those who cannot help themselves.

SKILLS: Fix, Resist
DOMAINS: Religion, Low Society

BONDS

- You have an individual-level bond with an NPC member of the congregation who is sympathetic to your goals. Name them, and what they're getting out of the relationship.
- You have a bond with a PC who you've helped overcome sickness, injury or addiction in the past. Say who it was, and what the problem was.

EQUIPMENT

- Ceremonial robes, a set of wooden and silver jewellery including bracelets, anklets, earrings and circlets.

Either:

- *L'od Nansan (The Order of Blood)* Knife (damage D3, Concealable) and Healer's kit (describe it)

Or:

- *L'od Limyé-Anjhan (The Order of Silver Light)* Moonsilver staff (damage D3, Conduit)

CORE ABILITIES

RITE OF RESPITE. [Divine] *You create a place of stillness and healing.* Once per session, lead your allies in a recuperation session while you hold vigil. Describe how you create a comfortable, healing environment and how you help them. All allies present may restore 3 stress from Mind or Blood.

MOONLIGHT. [Divine] *Limyé's light shines forth from you.* Your forehead gem (or necklace, or bracelet, etc) glows as brightly as the full moon, casting a calm light into the darkness that cannot be extinguished unless you decide to snuff it, or you fall unconscious. The more ritualists casting this spell simultaneously, the brighter the light becomes.

ADVANCES

LOW

BUILD BRIDGES. *You sacrifice yourself for your allies.* +1 Reputation. Before you roll for fallout on a bond, you may mark stress on yourself to remove it from the ally – each point you mark removes 2 points of stress from them.

BURN BRIDGES. *You sacrifice your allies for the greater good.* Gain the Deceive skill as a class skill. When an ally performs an action on your behalf, they may roll with mastery – but if they do so and suffer stress, roll twice and pick the higher value.

BEDSIDE MANNER. *Your ministrations engender trust.* When you heal someone, gain a bond with them until the end of the next day.

FRIEND TO THE DOWNTRODDEN. *You can sense who most needs your help*. +1 Reputation. Once per situation, ask the GM which NPC is most in need of help, and they'll tell you.

OUR LADY'S CALM. [Divine] *You shine the calming light of Limyé over a situation, and tempers fade*. Mark D6 stress to Mind to cast this spell. You, and anyone nearby to you, cannot fight, or engage in violent actions, or move above a run, for the next minute or so – you can extend it for another minute by marking another D6 stress to Mind.

RITE OF THE SILVER SANCTUARY. [Divine] *You mark a room as sacred to the goddess, barring the entry of trespassers.* Anoint the walls of an area (the size of a large room) with silver pigment mixed with sacred oils and mark D3 stress to Mind. If you are present in the area, you can stop or slow unwelcome guests from coming inside – if someone attempts to enter the area and you don't want them to, they take D6 stress. They can sense this beforehand and choose not to enter if they wish.

SCRYATRIX NASCEN. [Divine] *You possess uncanny senses, and take the first step along the path of the blind seer.* Spend ten minutes meditating and attuning to the area around you to uncover strangeness or things out of place. You may then ask the GM to reveal something hidden to you in your immediate area: this can be an item, a motivation, a pathway, etc. The GM will relay the information to you as a vision or sensation, not hard data.

MEDIUM

SHIMMERING IMAGE. [Divine] *Your body shifts and warps like moonlight on a pool of water and twists the world around it.* Whenever you mark stress to Blood, you and any nearby allies roll with mastery on Sneak and Pursue until the end of the situation or you mark stress to Blood again, whichever comes first.

RITE OF THE THREE SISTERS. [Divine] *You share misfortune between your allies.* Mark D3 stress to Mind when you cast this spell. You and two allies take part in a half-hour ritual in which your blood is mixed with sanctified mercury and daubed over your heart. Until the next dawn, when you or one of the other participants in the ritual mark stress, it is divided equally between all three of you. If one of the members of the trinity falls unconscious or dies, the spell ends.

SCRYATRIX INANIS [Divine] *You are accepted into the first circle of the Scryatrices, the blind seers of Our Glorious Lady.* You must have the SCRYATRIX NASCEN advance to purchase this advance. As part of an hour-long ritual, cover your eyes with cloth and silver – preferably spider-silk and broad, curved eye-shields with Our Lady's symbol on the inside of each. While you wear the covering, you can't see normally, but you can see the auras of people and places around you. Their auras show information about them that they simply cannot hide, cluing you in as to whether they're under supernatural influence, undead, or an occultist.

For each point of stress you mark against Mind when casting this spell, you are able to "see" one item from the following list:

- Any bonds the character has, or any important relationships if they're an NPC
- The target's current numerical stress values
- The subject's skills and domains
- Whether the target is undead, possessed or haunted (or is a ghost)
- Whether the character has cast a spell in recent memory, and what it was
- The character's emotional state

The spell lasts until you remove the bindings. Increase the difficulty of all other tasks by at least 1 when doing anything else, as you're effectively blind – certain tasks, like reading a book or looking for something in a painting, are impossible.

OUR LADY'S KISS: [Divine] *The goddess' protection presides over your allies.* When a nearby ally marks stress to Blood or Mind, you may mark D3 stress to Mind to cast this spell. If you choose to do so, the ally instantly removes D6 Blood or Mind stress before the GM rolls for fallout. In addition, when you guide a person to a gentle death in the arms of the Lady, refresh.

OUR LADY'S CURSE: [Divine] *You turn Limyé's light into a weapon.* When you cast MOONLIGHT, as described above, you may mark D3 stress to Mind to treat it as a damage D6 weapon (with the following tags: Spread D3, Stunning) until the end of the situation. Your jewellery bursts with a flash of bright, silvery light that incapacitates enemies.

PERFECT MIRROR. [Divine] *You can remake your mind into a psychic mirror.* Mark D3 stress to Mind to cast this spell. As part of an hour-long ritual

devoted to the goddess, you stare into a series of angled mirrors until your mind becomes untethered from your consciousness, instead reflecting the minds of those around it with perfect grace. Until the next sunrise, when you roll to affect an NPC in any way, you are treated as having all Domains that they have. (In addition, you are considered to have access to any knowledge that those Domains would confer on you.)

HIGH

BODY OF SILVER LIGHT. [Divine] Y*ou can change your body into pure moonlight.* +1 Mind. Mark D6 stress to Mind. As the culmination of an hour-long ritual, you dissolve into a roving patch of bright moonlight. In this form, you cannot affect the world (aside from illuminating it) and it cannot affect you, but you can move great distances at astonishing speed (and bypass any barrier that lets light through). This form lasts until sunrise, or until you wish to dismiss it.

OUR LADY'S MARTYR. [Divine] *While you stand, no others are allowed to fall.* +1 Blood. Mark D6 stress to Mind to cast this spell. You glow with a brilliant, radiant light that fuels the resolve of those around you; for the next scene, so long as you stand in defence of the drow people and faith, any ally standing nearby or closer to you does not have to roll for fallout when they mark stress to Blood or Mind. At the end of the situation, or when you fall or flee, the spell ends and all affected must immediately roll for fallout.

SCRYATRIX DEMEN. [Divine] *You are a blind seer, and can manipulate the connections that bind souls to the material realm.* You must have the SCRYATRIX INANIS ability to purchase this advance. You join a cadre of Scryatrices in a ritual where you blind yourself with sacred silver needles; from now on, you no longer see normally, but instead experience the world as a wash of strange visions and stolen memories. For example: you can no longer read a book, but you can "look" at it and absorb the memories of the person who last read it, or the person who wrote it.

As a full Scryatrix, you have access to all the visions listed in SCRYATRIX INANIS at all times. In addition, by marking D3 stress, you can sever any one of the connections you see. If you sever a bond, that relationship withers and dies; if you sever a possession, the spirit is flung from the host's body; and so on. You cannot sever stress in this manner, but anything else is fair game, and may require some creative interpretation between you and the GM.

BEYOND THE GARDEN GATE. [Divine] *You can reclaim souls from the embrace of Our Glorious Lady.* +2 Mind stress. When you cast this spell, take D8 stress to Mind. You can bring a dark elf back from the dead, so long as their body is largely intact. Communing with Our Lady in a long, drawn-out ritual, you beseech her to return their soul to the earthly realm for a time to complete their tasks.

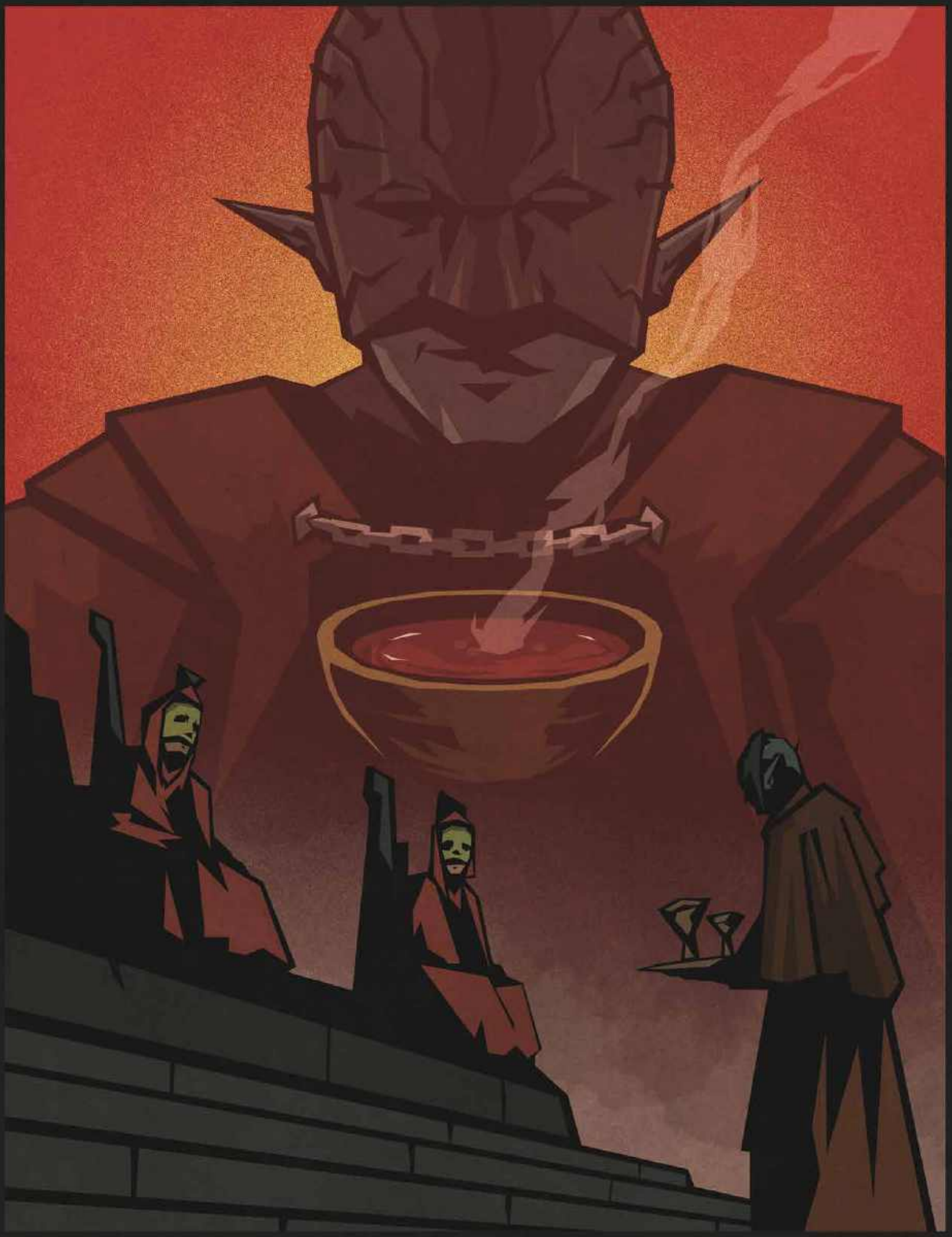
For a full lunar month, the target returns to life and acts as normal. At the end of that month, they die once more, and nothing can bring them back from the Moon Garden, except for physically travelling there and freeing them from death's clutches.

Further Lajhan advances, devoted to saints or hallows of the order, can be found on page 158.

AURAS

The art of aura reading is at least as old as the church of Our Glorious Lady, most likely older, and it is not an exact science. A character could study for years under the blind Scryatrixes at the Lunar Temple and learn a fraction of what has been documented, and argued over, in relation to the understanding of the patterns read in the souls of others. But, as a rough guide – a person's aura will shift, pulsing through colours and shapes, and flashing though strange glyphs and symbols, that the Lajhan should read as though they were a fortune-teller interpreting the leaves at the bottom of a cup of Nujabian tea. The undead show up as strange, glass-like statues of themselves in aura readings, and no-one's quite sure why.

Example things that might show up in portents and aura readings: the moon, in all its forms; birds, such as owls, ravens, sparrows and hawks; the Moon Garden, the drow land of the dead; crumbling towers, spires and parapets; unearthly music; gleaming needles, pins and scissors; gushing blood, organs and hearts; thread and rope; ringing bells and guttered candles; the drowned, and those who have died of exposure; silver ivy and bone-white trees.



MASKED

"Ah, my Lord, my apologies – these are the correct manifests, not the ones you have there. I've had the delivery boy shot already to anticipate your desires."

You spent your durance serving a high elf master in the upper echelons of Spire. You are well-accustomed to wearing a ceremonial mask in company, as all aelfir and their servants are expected to do, and you are a master of subterfuge, going unnoticed, and quiet acts of rebellion.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: Silver +1, Mind +1, Shadow +2

REFRESH: Show someone they should not have underestimated you.

CLASS SKILLS: Resist, Compel
DOMAINS: High Society, Order

BONDS

- You have one street-level bond with the servants of your old master. Name three of them and describe their jobs, and note down your master's name and the worst thing they ever did to you or someone else under their power.
- You have a bond with another PC who you assisted during their durance. Who was it, and how did you help them out?

EQUIPMENT

- Your Mask (describe it)
- Two sets of nice clothing (describe them)
- Servant Mask (carries the sign of your old master)

Either:
- Hawk Duelling Pistol (Damage D6, Piercing, Ranged, One-shot)

Or:
- Dagger (Damage D3, Concealable)

CORE ABILITIES

SMELL STATUS. *You know precisely who to talk to, or who to take out, to get things done.* Once per session, ask the GM: "Who's really in charge, here?" You can find out easily, or you already know thanks to your connections.

SERVANT TO THE HIGH ONES. *You spent years bowing and scraping at the feet of the high elves.* When interacting with the aelfir, roll with mastery on social checks.

ADVANCES

LOW

CITIZEN'S MASK. *When you need to be, you become one of the crowd.* Gain the Sneak skill. When you wear your Citizen's Mask, you roll with mastery when you're attempting to pass yourself off as someone unimportant or beneath the attention of your target.

INSTITUTIONAL FALSEHOOD. *A single misplaced document or amended sentence can send ripples through an organisation.* Gain access to the Academia domain. Once per session, when you have access to the paperwork or employees of a particular organisation and five minutes to spare, you can disseminate a lie through the organisation that will be widely believed until it is proven false.

INNER MASK OF CALM. *You wall up your madness in other identities.* + 2 Mind. In addition, when you suffer Mind fallout, you can disregard any effects placed on you from the fallout by removing your current mask. When you put the mask back on, the effects will resume. For each session you spend without wearing the mask, mark D3 stress to Mind.

ONE OF THE STAFF. *You'd be surprised how much chambermaids see.* Gain the Deceive skill. Once per session, you can seamlessly blend into the household staff or employees of an organisation or group and keep your ears open for information. For every hour you spend performing busywork (up to a maximum of 3), ask the GM one question about the organisation that they must answer honestly.

ONE EYE OPEN. *A life of regular beatings and cruel "gifts" have hardened you.* Gain access to the Fight skill. Even when you're asleep or knocked unconscious, you have an awareness of your surroundings. You suffer no penalties for being surprised or ambushed, you are broadly aware of your location even if blindfolded and moved around, and any weapon you carry has the Surprising tag.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS. *A good cravat can cover all manner of sins.* Gain access to the Fix skill. If you spend an hour helping an ally prepare before a difficult endeavour, picking out their clothes and advising them on methods of approach, they roll with mastery on Compel and Deceive checks for the next situation.

MEDIUM

MASK OF THE LOVER. *You wear an exquisitely beautiful mask, gifted only to those who carry themselves with the utmost grace and poise.* +2 Reputation. Once per session, if you so choose, an NPC falls for you. Tell the GM who.

MASK OF THE KILLER. *You have a mask that you wore to carry out the bloody business of your Lord.* Gain +1 Blood. When you wear this mask, your hands function as D6 weapons. The ritual to don the mask is a five minute process that requires a quiet and calm area to perform – it can be taken off instantly, however.

MASK OF PLENTY. [Occult] *The mask of plenty is a favoured tool amongst destitute nobles and scheming tricksters.* +2 Silver and gain access to the Commerce domain. When you wear this mask, you give off the impression that you are rich, famous and charismatic. People will treat you appropriately, even if you give them reasons not to, and will expect repayment for favours to be an easy task for you.

MOUTHLESS MASK. [Occult] *The most precise application of grace, to some, is silence.* Gain the Sneak skill. While wearing the mask (which is worn by clenching it between your teeth – it has no straps), you can elect to make no noise when you perform any action – and objects or people nearby will be silent too. You cannot speak while wearing the Mouthless Mask, for obvious reasons.

MIRROR-MASK. [Occult] *This scintillating mask clouds the minds of others, tricking them into a sense of security.* You construct a delicate mask from mirrored glass and rare spireblack amber, and when you wear it and talk at length to a target, they enter a peculiar trance where they believe they're talking to themselves. As such, they will have no issue with revealing dangerous truths or plots. This ability only works when the target is alone – should anyone else enter the scene, the trance ends.

HIGH

THE MASTERLESS MASK. [Occult] *You become an avatar of the rebellion. You create a mask that is whispered of in aelfir circles – the Masterless Mask, terror of the aelfir, scion of the Red Moon, who will visit their doom upon them.* When you wear it, you roll with mastery and inflict D8 stress when you attack an aelfir, regardless of what weapon you're using to do it.

What's more, each night a drow in Spire prays to you to deliver them from their masters, refresh. Ten or so people removes D3 stress, a hundred D6, and a thousand or more will remove D8.

GESTALT. [Occult] *You understand the riddle of masks; that they are more real than the faces they hide.* You have crafted a true copy of your own mask, a long and harrowing process using not a small amount of your own blood and skin. When another person dons your mask – a process that takes an hour or so, and one they do not have to be willing to perform – until the next sunrise they are controlled by your mind as though you were controlling your own body. Your original body stays active during this time – you play two characters, both of whom are the same person. When the wearer removes the mask, they are entirely aware of the actions they performed while wearing it, which is the sort of thing that inflicts Mind stress to say the least.

Unlike other High-level advances, you can take Gestalt as many times as you wish, crafting a new mask each time.

THE MASK OF MANY FACES. [Occult] *You train spiders to weave illusory faces over your own.* Using old drow sorcery from Ys, you capture and train the deep-spiders that scurry around the edges of the Heart, the rotten core of Spire. While the spiders are living in your hair and on your face, they can be instructed to weave a mask that replicates any person (or any mask) that you have seen before. The reproduction is almost perfect but it cannot get wet, or withstand the heat of the sun, else it will fall away to nothing.

PANTHEON MASK. [Occult] *Your masks are so artful as to trick the gods themselves.* You gain an uncanny ability to create masks that emulate the power of specific gods; to do so, mark D6 stress to Mind or Silver, and acquire something of the faith to bind into it. When you create the mask, you may bind any Medium-level divine advance into it, and access it whenever you wear it. You may only have one such mask at any one time, and must sacrifice your current godmask if you wish to make a new one.

MIDWIFE

"Of course I will fight for you; the web connects us all, brother."

You are one of a line of ancient scholars and defenders of the drow, blessed with an arachnid bloodline that you have been taught to augment via sorcery and meditation. In addition to this, you are responsible for the future of your race: you take care of unborn drow while they gestate in their egg-sacs, watching over them and keeping them safe from harm.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: Blood +2, Reputation +1, Mind +1

REFRESH: Defend the defenceless.

SKILLS: Fix, Fight
DOMAINS: Occult, Low Society

BONDS

- You have a street-level bond with the Order of Midwives, and are an active member. Name your immediate superior, who does not know you work for the Ministry, and one colleague, who does.
- You have a bond with another player character, whose life you saved when no-one else would. Say who, and what they'd done to ostracise themselves from their community.

EQUIPMENT

- Ceremonial silk robes

Either:
- Twin Razors (D6, Concealable, Unreliable)

Or:
- Weighted chain (D3, Concealable, Stunning)

CORE ABILITIES

MARTYR. *You sacrifice your life, inch by inch, to safeguard the future of the drow.* Once per session, when an ally takes fallout, you appear nearby so long as it would be even slightly feasible for you to do so. They ignore the effects of the fallout, and you take D6 stress to an appropriate resistance instead.

PROTECTOR'S EYE. *Ancient instincts, bound into you by forgotten sorcery, give you a measure of what a person really cares about.* Once per situation, ask the GM what a particular NPC wishes to protect above all else.

ADVANCES

LOW

CANTICLE OF REMAKING. [Occult] *Intoning ancient psalms to forgotten powers, you bind your wounds with strands of ethereal web.* +1 Blood. Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, remove D6 stress from Blood on yourself, or D3 stress from Blood on another character.

WEB OF THE MISTRESS. [Occult] *Strands of silver magic extend from your fingertips, and you sense the vibrations caused by any intruders.* Gain the Pursue skill. Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, you gain immediate awareness of everything in the vicinity – an area about the size of a large building – even if you can't see or hear it directly. This remains in effect until you move, or are moved, more than a step away from your current position.

HANDS OF THE MOTHER. [Occult] *At will, your hands become dangerous weapons as your nails harden and flexible plates cover your palms.* Your unarmed damage becomes (D6, Bloodbound).

BLESSING OF ISHKRAH. [Occult] *You weave a spell of protection over your allies, and inky spiders crawl across their skin.* Gain the Academia domain. Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, your allies are under the protection of Ishkrah: the first time they suffer stress to Blood in combat, the enemy that caused the stress suffers D3 stress from arachnid nightmares assaulting their senses.

PLUCK THE WEB. [Occult] *You bind up tiny effigies of your foes with glistening silk, and force them to act upon each other.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, any two connected entities or groups of your choosing (whatever their size, so long as they share a connection) immediately act upon one another in whichever fashion the GM sees fit.

EYES OF ISHKRAH. [Occult] *You grow additional eyes with which you can sense the threads of magic.* Gain the Investigate skill. Roll Investigate+Occult to cast. On a success, you see all forms of occult magic in the surrounding area as shimmering webs of fate (including those around invisible creatures, or people observing you remotely) until the end of the current situation. You can follow these threads to the point where the spell was cast.

RITE OF STILLED MIND. [Occult] *You have been taught the secret art of decanting your madness into ink-black liquid that you spit into vials.* Once per session, remove an ongoing minor or moderate Mind fallout result, or downgrade one severe Mind fallout result to moderate.

MEDIUM

WEAVE THE WEB. [Occult] *You can weave a bond between people who've never met, forcing them into each other's destiny.* As PLUCK THE WEB, but the groups or entities involved do not have to share a connection for you to affect them.

CHITINOUS SHELL. [Occult] *Your skin shifts and hardens into scintillating chitin on your command.* Gain the Resist skill. Roll Resist+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, gain Armour 3 until the next dawn.

COCOON OF REBIRTH. [Occult] *You smother an ally with a cocoon of magical silk, a process which takes several hours.* Within this cocoon, they are remade into their ideal image, free from scars, madness and injuries. At the end of a week, cut them free (they are unable to free themselves) – any long-term effects of Blood and Mind fallout are removed.

VENOMOUS MANDIBLES. [Occult] *You sprout mandibles from your lower jaw, and drool an excruciating venom over your weapons.* Roll Fight+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, until the next dawn, all your attacks with your bare hands or edged weapons gain the Brutal quality, and you can spit your venom as a (D6, Ranged, Unreliable) attack.

WALL-WALKER. [Occult] *You conjure an additional set of legs that grow out of your pelvis with the sound of cracking chitin.* Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, until the end of the current situation, you roll with mastery on Pursue checks, and may walk on any grippable surface as though it was flat ground.

ARACHNID BODY. [Occult] *Your body changes to become more beautiful and closer to the form of your patron.* If you possess WALL-WALKER, CHITINOUS SHELL, EYES OF ISHKRAH or

VENOMOUS MANDIBLES, choose one. You no longer need to roll to cast the spell, as your form changes permanently. You can take this advance up to four times, choosing a different ability to make permanent each time.

SUMMON SWEETLINGS. [Occult] *You bring forth a swarm of spiders from your clothing that swarm out over the surrounding area.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast. On a success, you summon a swarm of spiders. When you summon the spiders, choose one type of spider to summon:

- Watch-webs: These spiders have keen eyes, and whisper to you in the tongue of Ishkrah. They function as the WEB OF THE MISTRESS spell, but they will stay in place for a week or so, and you can move freely without breaking the spell. A tiny spider living in your ear canal will whisper what they see to you, no matter how far away you are.
- Dagger-weavers: These spiders are fast, and swarm all over targets to inject their nightmarish venom. The swarm is usable as a (D6, Piercing, Spread D6, Stunning, One-shot) weapon.

At the end of the spell, the spiders scuttle back into your clothing or dissipate into the shadows.

HIGH

ISHKRAH'S PERFECT COCOON. [Occult] *You know of a strange and beautiful spell that can undo all kinds of misfortunes by wrapping the subject in the blessed web of Ishkrah herself.* As COCOON OF REBIRTH, but: it applies to any fallout the character is suffering from, not just Blood and Mind. In addition, the first time they undergo the procedure, they gain +1 Blood.

PURGE. [Occult] *Your form is perfect and inviolate, bound up with the sacred threads of Ishkrah.* Once per session, immediately clear yourself of all Blood stress and all ongoing Blood fallout.

NO MAGIC BUT THE MAGIC OF MY MISTRESS. [Occult] *The spells of inferior casters – and gods – are caught in your web like flies.* Roll Fight+Occult to cast. On a success, any effect that originates from a magical source (be that occult or divine) is suppressed while you are nearby until the end of the current situation. Minor magical effects are completely undone, and you become immune to magic attacks. (This will require some creative interpretation from the GM to resolve.)

FORM OF ISHKRAH: [Occult] *You unbind your body's bones and reform them, painfully, into the form of a great and terrible half-spider, half-drow.* Roll Fix+Occult to cast. On a success, you immediately gain access to EYES OF ISHKRAH, HANDS OF THE MOTHER, WALL-WALKER, CHITINOUS SHELL and VENOMOUS MANDIBLES if you do not already have them. In addition, when you act to defend the future of the drow race or some unborn drow, roll six dice. These effects last until the end of the current situation.

VERMISSIAN SAGE

"I reckon I've got just the book you need – problem is it's eight stations down and five across, so you might want to bring provisions."

The Vermissian is a grand failure – an attempt at a mass transport network in Spire by over-funded human retroengineers – that buckled the walls between worlds and fell into ruin. Now, in the mazelike tunnels and dead-end corridors, a sect of drow historians is attempting to use the non-euclidian space to store information and relics of their home nations. You are one such drow – a sage of the Vermissian Vault.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: Mind +3, Shadow +1

REFRESH: Uncover hidden information.

CLASS SKILLS: Investigate, Compel
DOMAINS: Academia, Occult, Technology

BONDS

- You have an individual-level bond with an academic, researcher or guardian of the Vault. Name them, and their specialty.
- You have a bond with another PC – you know a secret about them. Say who it is, what the secret is, and whether they know you know or not.

EQUIPMENT

Either:
- Folding crossbow (D6, Ranged, Concealable, One-shot)

Or:
- Dagger (D3, Concealable) and padded vest (Armour 1)

CORE ABILITIES

BACK DOOR. *You throw open a door and lunge through it into a twisted metallic nightmare: home.* Once per session, you can find an entrance to the Vault no matter where you are in Spire (whether it was there before you started looking remains unclear). Inside, you'll find a collection of strange items and peculiar books, many of which relate or come from alternate histories, and some of which tell the truth. Any non-Sage character who enters the Vault should roll Resist+Occult or suffer Mind stress.

THE VAULT. *You have access to the vast informational resources of the sages.* While inside the Vault, whether you accessed it through a Back Door or by normal means, you have access to equipment that will allow you to perform an Investigate check on any subject. It won't confer mastery, but it will allow you to perform the check.

OBSESSIVE RESEARCHER. *You spend every quiet moment filling your brain with knowledge – knowledge which is often fleeting.* At the start of each session, gain a knack of your choosing in any skill or domain, even if you don't normally have access to the skill or domain. At the end of the session, you lose that knack. You can't have the same knack two sessions in a row; you get bored, and must expand your mind in different ways.

ADVANCES

LOW

FIND CONNECTION. [Occult] *You use the unique capabilities of the Vermissian Vault to unlock secrets about a target.* Once per session, declare that two NPCs are connected somehow – ask the GM in what way.

DEAD DROP. *You have a network of concealed caches, filled with useful equipment.* +1 Silver. Once per session, find a hidden stash of equipment that you, another scholar, or a version of you from an anomalous history has left in place to prepare for this eventuality. The drop allows you to equip a small

group of people with generic equipment to perform a particular task (e.g. lockpicks, dark cloaks, matches and lanterns, food, etc). This equipment will never confer mastery.

MENTAL DIRECTORY. [Occult] *You can smell knowledge.* +1 Mind. Roll Investigate+Occult and ask the GM a question. On a success, they don't have to tell you the answer, but they do have to tell you the most straightforward way of getting one. (For example: You can't know the combination to a safe, but you can know that it's written down on a scrap of paper tucked into the overseer's diary.)

THE LOCKED STACKS. [Occult] *You have access to the Locked Stacks, a dead and dusty place where knowledge is interred to an eternal rest.* +1 Mind. When you visit the Locked Stacks, you can attempt to suppress a single fact or rumour – roll Compel+Occult. On a success, the information will begin to fade out of public knowledge unless someone makes a dedicated effort to make it known.

THORNED TONGUE. [Occult] *Untruths, in your presence, burn like cinders.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, you can punish people for lying to you: for the next situation, if someone lies to you (not through omission, but actively presents a falsehood) they mark D3 stress as searing pain shoots through their body and stabs behind their eyes. This is enough to put most people off ever lying to you, if they know who you are.

THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN. [Occult] *Reality is malleable, in the right hands: yours.* Gain the Fix skill. Once per session, re-roll all the dice in your pool, as you reveal the events that just happened to be false. You can try this trick a second time, but you take D6 stress to Mind when you do so.

MEDIUM

POCKET GUIDE. [Occult] *You bind the essence of the one surviving accurate map of the Vermissian into your mind.* Roll Investigate+Occult and ask the GM a question. If you succeed, they will tell you where the answer lies in the Vermissian Vault. Getting there will be a long process (taking at least half an hour) and the answer to the question probably won't tell you everything you need to know, but there are no limits on the questions you can ask.

UNSPEAKABLE. [Occult] *You focus your mind and catch the words before they escape their throat.* +2 Mind. Focus on an NPC and roll Compel+Occult. If you succeed, they will no longer be able to speak about a concept of your choosing – the words will escape them. This lasts until the end of the current situation.

MEMORY BLANK. [Occult] *You pluck unwanted events from the minds of those around you.* +1 Mind. Focus on a target and roll Compel+Occult. If you succeed, they forget a specific, short, recent event. They will overwrite it with events of their own invention that join up the gaps in their memory.

DYNASTIC MEMORY. [Divine] *You awaken the ancestral blood in your allies.* +2 Reputation. Mark D3 stress to Mind to channel the power of the ancient Houses of the Home Nations, and give you and your allies strength. The first time you use this power on a character, determine which House they originate from by choosing it from the list on the opposite page. From then on, when you use this power on them, they gain access to the relevant power for the remaining situation. (This spell only functions when cast on dark elves.)

VERMISSIAN DROP. [Occult] *You plunge a target into the dark realm of the Vermissian, hopefully never to return.* Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, you immediately plunge one nearby target into the depths of the Vermissian through a hitherto-unseen trapdoor, hole or gap in reality. They may or may not be able to fight their way out and find you afterwards, or cause problems whilst they're inside, but they're out of your hair for now.

HIGH

UNREADABLE. [Occult] *You snatch whole concepts out of your target's mind, leaving them unable to comprehend basic truths.* As UNSPEAKABLE, but the target cannot perceive the concept of your choosing in any way. Depending on what you pick, this can be of no concern to the target (if they lose the ability to perceive, or even really understand the concept of, intruders) or terrifying (if they can no longer interact with the idea of light). This spell alone won't kill a target, as the body works on more fundamental levels than the one you're tapping into, but it can make it a lot easier. This lasts until the end of the current situation.

THE HOUSES OF THE DROW

House	Effect
Destera, the Weavers	Spiders adore you and will perform self-sacrificing actions on your behalf
Yssen, the Unquiet Blades	If you wear no armour, your attacks have the Brutal and Surprising tags
Malrique, the Unlidded Eye	You cannot be surprised or ambushed
Valwa, the Silver-blooded	When you successfully Compel a target, gain a temporary bond with them
Gryndel, the Crimson Hunters	When you declare a target's full name out loud and they hear it, you roll with mastery on Fight and Pursue actions against them. You can only do this for one target at a time
Starys, the Drowned Kings	You no longer need to breathe
Aliquam, Repairers of Reputations	At the end of the situation, remove all stress marked against Reputation
Duval, the Grave Cold	By focusing for a minute or so, you may not be seen so long as you remain motionless and close your eyes
Quinn, the Noble and Most High	You can smell gold, silver, jewels and other items of value

ANASTOMOSIS. [Occult] *You connect the power of the Vault to the real world, letting alternate truths blossom into Spire.* Gain mastery of Deceit. You can briefly let out the energies of the Vault into the real world to spread false information. Roll Deceive+Occult. On a success, you create the world's most believable lie; not only is the lie backed up by incontrovertible evidence, but you can deliver it with such weight that even the person it's about could believe it's true. The more audacious the lie, the higher the amount of stress you risk taking.

The lie is a lie, though, so it's not possible to say that gravity doesn't exist and have everyone float away into the sky. But it is possible to have gravity as a theory widely debunked by the academic community, and replaced with something else that you have waiting in the wings, if that's something you'd like to do.

THE GLASS LIBRARY. *You have access to the Glass Library, a strange place that filters ambient information from Spire and distills it into books, newspapers, scraps of information and works of art.* Gain mastery of Investigation. While you sit in the Glass Library, you can investigate any location in Spire as though you had unfettered, uninterrupted access to it.

The Glass Library is also bathed in sunlight during the day due to a strange quirk of the information filtering process. Unlike normal sunlight, this does not burn the skin of dark elves, though many sages find it uncomfortably bright.

REWRITE. [Occult] *Who controls the Vault controls the past.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell. Gathering your allies in the Vault, you use the strange energies there to change the events of the past. You, and each ally present, can remove one ongoing fallout they are currently suffering from, as well as refreshing D6 stress from any of their resistances. Any remaining stress can be reallocated to any resistance on any member of the ritual.

It is through your skill as a sage (and careful doctoring of newspaper reports and witness statements) that you subtly tweak the past – the timestream can't handle big changes, and tends to reject them out of hand. As such, this power can't be used to mould the past into a more pleasing shape, except when it comes to who's suffering what stress.

EXTRA ADVANCES

These abilities aren't limited by class. You can unlock access to each set of advances by satisfying the requirement listed at the top of each entry, and then purchase them as you would in-class powers.

If you would like to start play with access to one of these sets of advances, discuss the matter with your GM. It can safely be assumed that every player character has access to the minister set, given their allegiance.

GENERIC ADVANCES

If you want access to a skill or domain, you can purchase it with a Low Advance. You can also use a Low Advance to gain +1 to any resistance. This isn't a hugely exciting use of the advance, but it can help you use abilities that you've picked up from multi-classing or extra advances.

CITY GUARD

REQUIREMENT: Serve, or have served, in the City Guard.
REFRESH: Make an arrest.

LOW

WEIGHT OF THE LAW. *You wave your badge around to get what you need.* Take D3 stress to Shadow to roll with mastery on your next suitable social interaction as you threaten people with arrest.

SUBDUE. *You're used to hurting, but not killing, criminals.* Any non-edged melee weapon you carry gains the Stunning tag.

CUT THROUGH RED TAPE. *You are well-versed in the draconic legislation that permates Spire.* +1 Reputation. When you attempt to navigate through bureaucracy, you do so with mastery.

MEDIUM

EVERYONE'S GUILTY OF SOMETHING. *You know they did it, and they know they did it; all you have to do now is apply leverage.* Once per session, select an NPC. The GM tells you what crimes they've committed (and they have committed a crime in recent memory, thanks to this ability); you have no solid proof, but a good hunch.

UNDERCOVER EXPERT. *You're spent many a night undercover.* The first time you take Shadow fallout in a session, ignore it.

SEEN WORSE THAN THIS. *Years on the streets of Spire have hardened your mind.* The first time you take Mind fallout in a session, ignore it.

CHOSEN OF THE HUNGRY DEEP

REQUIREMENT: Lose someone or something genuinely irreplaceable. Attend regular ceremonies to the hungry deep at the Church of Absolution in Derelictus, or commune with it on your own terms at least once a week.
REFRESH: Destroy something of beauty, giving it to the deep as sacrifice. Someone who is beautiful will work too, as the deep doesn't view people and things differently from each other – they're all just matter.

LOW

DECAY. [Divine] *Your touch is poison.* Mark 1 stress to Mind and touch the doorframe of a normal-sized house or apartment; all foodstuffs in the building will become spoiled and inedible, and potable water will be changed into brackish, stinking liquid. Mark more stress to Mind to affect a bigger area.

CONTAGION. [Divine] *You breathe virulent life into poxes.* Touch someone with a disease and mark D6 stress to Blood or Mind. Additional people equal to the amount of stress you marked will catch this disease before the dawn of the next day.

DESTRUCTION. [Divine] *You rust and decay items with but a kiss.* Mark D3 stress and commune with the deep over a non-unique item, or part of an item (such as the lock in a door). Over the next few minutes, that item degrades into nothingness.

MEDIUM

ROT. [Divine] *The world tilts towards decay, and you are the fulcrum*. Mark 1 or more stress to Blood or Mind up to a maximum of 6. Through communion and whispered prayers, the corruption of the deep bubbles up around the caster. For the next day, whenever a nearby character takes stress (including friendly characters), increase the result by 1 for each 2 stress you marked during the cast. In addition, wounds get infected, metal rusts, and damp creeps up the walls around you.

BLESSING. [Divine] *Weapons moulder and crumble when brought against you and your allies.* Mark D3 stress to Blood or Mind, and mark 1 stress to Blood or Mind on each other participant in the ritual. You place your hand over the heart of each participant and ask the deep to bless them in their endeavours; if they are attacked with weapons during the next situation, those weapons inflict stress as though they were 1 dice size smaller as they rust, malfunction and come apart in their attackers' hands.

TRUTH. [Divine] *You speak the nightmare truth of Spire in dark, chattering syllables.* Mark D3 stress to Mind and gesture at someone within earshot while chattering in strange tongues; you communicate to them the full majesty of the decay that sits within the heart of Spire. Everyone else who hears you marks 1 Mind stress; the target suffers D6 stress, or D8 stress if you're right up in their face when you talk to them.

SWARM. [Divine] *You birth horrid creatures into the world.* Mark D3 stress to Blood or Mind and retch up a writhing mass about the size of both of your hands clenched together. When it hits the ground, it will explode into a swarm of highly venomous flapping creatures which look something between moths, horseflies, and maggots that spiral around you. Anyone who approaches you takes D3 stress as a matter of course, repeated each time they act in your presence. Most sensible people will just run away.

ENLISTED

REQUIREMENT: Serve, or have served, as a soldier in the allied defence forces.
REFRESH: Have another character follow your orders, even when they'd rather not.

LOW

KEEP MOVING. *There are more important things than pain.* +1 Mind. Mark D3 stress to Mind or Blood; you, and any nearby allies, ignore the effects of minor fallout until the end of the situation.

SQUAD LEADER. *You were a sergeant in the allied defence forces.* +1 Reputation. Gain the Compel skill and Order domain.

MARTIAL TRAINING. *Hidden in your lodgings, you have a proscribed military weapon stolen from the army.* Gain the Fight skill and access to your military weapon – either a Legrande rifle (D6, Accurate, Ranged) or Raven long-gun (D6, Extreme Range, Reload, Unreliable). Ownership of this gun is illegal.

THE SIGHT. *You received occult training, most of which you can't remember, at the hands of the Special Tactics Corps.* Gain access to the Occult domain and +1 Mind. When you refuse a direct order from a superior in the corps, you must pass a Resist+Order check not to obey it.

MEDIUM

BATTLE LEADER. *You lead the assault.* When you inflict damage to an enemy in combat, all allies who attack that enemy gain the Brutal tag for their attacks. This lasts until you next act.

INSPIRING. *You've seen people walk on broken legs. You'll get out of this.* As Keep Moving, but it works for the first moderate fallout any allies suffer during the situation, too.

CONDUIT. *Your mind is theirs.* (Requires THE SIGHT.) +1 Mind. You uncover a hidden memory – you were implanted with a memetic virus by the Special Tactics corps. It allows occultists to use your body as a ritual proxy. If your allies have some of your blood to hand they can cast occult spells through you, treating you as the origin point – and optionally the target. Stress taken as a result of the spell is halved between you and the caster.

THE FAITHFUL OF KING TEETH

REQUIREMENT: Worship at the feet of the nightmare demigod King Teeth in Grist. Pay tribute to him in the form of the flesh of elf or man or gnoll. Eat of the forbidden flesh yourself.

REFRESH: Eat the flesh of elf, man or gnoll. The more you eat (and the tastier it was), the bigger the refresh dice.

LOW

SKITTER. [Divine] *Your nails distend into sacred talons.* Mark D3 stress to Mind or Blood to cast this spell. Your fingernails and toenails (don't wear shoes) grow long, hard and yellowed. Not only do they now count as D3 weapons, but you gain mastery on any Pursue or Stealth checks that involve climbing or hanging off ceilings. This lasts until the end of the current situation, at which point they will grow brittle and splinter off.

GORGE. [Divine] *You cram still-living people into your belly, where they die.* When you take a target out of action or totally restrain them, you can immediately eat them whole by unhinging your jaw and forcing them into your guts, where they will squirm around and die. If you do this, remove D6 stress, and anyone who sees it happen takes D6 stress to Mind (D8 if they knew the guy). After you eat them, you're not good for much until you can digest them – a process that takes about 8 hours.

MEDIUM

RETCH. [Divine] *Your stomach acid is blessed by King Teeth, and it will sear through anything.* Mark D6 stress to Mind or Blood to cast this spell. You vomit up about a bucket's worth of hideously strong stomach acid over anything in front of you. It will melt through pretty much anything, and it can be used as a D8, Devastating weapon against someone you've grabbed first.

GREYMANOR INVESTIGATOR

REQUIREMENT: Pass an interview with the owner of Greymanor, Maxwell Roche.

REFRESH: Solve a case assigned to you by the bureau.

LOW

TRIPPING OVER THEIR FEET. *Sometimes, getting beaten up is the best way to learn things.* If you lose a fight, you can ask the GM three questions about your current investigation that somehow connect to the fight. They should answer you honestly.

A NOSE FOR TROUBLE. *Civilised society is one bad decision away from descending into chaos. You make those bad decisions.* Once per situation, ask the GM what action would cause the most trouble. If you perform that action, roll with mastery.

SMELL CORRUPTION. *You know what strings to pull to get things done.* Once per situation, select an NPC. The GM will tell you two ways in which they're corrupt, one of which is true.

THOROUGH INVESTIGATOR. *You separate the wheat from the chaff.* Gain the Investigate skill. You know instinctively which clue is the most important in a given scene (if there is more than one clue).

MEDIUM

EVERYONE'S GOT A SECRET. *No-one's telling the whole truth.* Once per session, when you spend a few minutes interacting with an NPC, ask the GM what their secret is (if they don't have one, make one up). You don't have hard evidence proving your hunch, but you know in your heart that it's true.

TOO DRUNK TO CARE. *You're a washed-up, worthless drunk who's not ashamed to debase themselves if it gets them out of trouble.* If you're loaded on hooch and you take minor or moderate fallout, mark D6 stress to Reputation and ignore the results of the fallout.

HIGH

TAKE A BEATING. *You've been shot, stabbed and clubbed about the head so many times that getting your nose broken feels like a godsdamn vacation.* Gain the Resist skill. If you would mark stress to Blood, at a value less than half your current Blood stress, do not mark it.

A DAMNOU WALKED INTO MY OFFICE. *One last job, and then you're out of the game.* Within the week, the trinity of drow goddesses known as Damnou will ask you to perform your services on their behalf. The risk, and the rewards, are impossibly great.

HELLIONITE

REQUIREMENT: Attend a few sermons at Brother Hellion's Church of the Gun on Kiln Street in Red Row. Own a gun that you have named – crossbows and bows definitely don't count.
REFRESH: Use your gun to get what you want.

LOW

SACRED SHOT. [Divine] *Sometimes, all it takes is one bullet.* Inscribe the scriptures of Brother Hellion on a bullet and mark 1 Blood or Mind stress. When you fire this bullet and hit, it gains the Brutal tag. In addition, if the stress dice match, add them together and inflict that much stress.

BLESSING OF THE REVOLVING CHAMBER. [Divine] *You bind your fortune to a spun cylinder.* Mark D3 Blood stress to cast this spell and spin the chambers of a pistol with a revolving magazine, then roll a D6 and mark down the number. For the next situation, if you would take stress equal to this number, you do not take stress at all.

MEDIUM

VIRGIN BIRTH. [Divine] *Hellion's miracles remove the need for powder and shot.* Mark D3 stress and sanctify your gun with your own, or someone else's, blood as part of a half-hour ritual. You call forth an angel of gunpowder to bless your weapon, and for the next situation, you ignore the Reload tag on the weapon.

BOUND DEVIL. [Divine] *You can summon dark and terrible spirits into weapons with an occluded rite that Brother Hellion tries to hide from his congregation.* Mark D6 stress to cast this spell over a gun; it permanently increases its stress dice by 1 step, but gains the Dangerous tag. (You can't cast this spell on the same gun more than once.)

HIGH

BALLISTIC AVATAR. [Divine] *In your hands, guns are destruction and will made incarnate.* Mark D3 stress. Any gun you carry for the next situation you enter inflicts D8 stress and gains the Piercing and Extreme Range tags.

THE SAINT OF BULLETS. [Divine] *Every bullet in Spire loves you like a brother.* Bullets, or indeed anything fired using explosives, no longer inflict stress on you. Each time someone shoots at you with intent to harm, refresh D3.

LUCK-PRIEST OF STOLZ

REQUIREMENT: Gamble an important part of your life – a partner, a limb, a sense – solely in order to offer it up to Stolz, if she wants it. Wear the sacred vestments of Stolz – scarves, ties and cloaks in many vibrant colours.

REFRESH: Put your life, or the lives of your allies, at risk.

LOW

SECOND CHANCES. [Divine] *You know a minor prayer to the Goddess of luck, often used by gamblers.* After you've rolled dice to resolve an action but before play continues, mark up to 3 stress (against any resistance you wish) and mutter a prayer to Stolz under your breath. You may re-roll as many dice as you marked stress.

THE SACRED ART. [Divine] *You always know where to find some action.* Once per session, you can find a gambling session where the stakes are interestingly high, or somehow relevant to your ongoing story. In addition, when you take part in games of chance, roll with mastery.

MEDIUM

NOT YET. *The difference between life and death is a roll of the dice.* Once per situation, when the GM rolls for fallout on you or a nearby ally, make them re-roll their dice if successful.

THE GODDESS' SHIELD. [Divine] *Stolz smiles on you, and your enemies weapons misfire or cause flesh wounds instead of fatal injuries.* Mark 1 stress to cast this spell. For the next situation, when used against you, weapons use the damage dice below the one they'd normally use (i.e. a D6 weapon becomes a D3 weapon).

HIGH

AVATAR OF THE FOOL. [Divine] *No-one stops the Fool.* Mark D6 stress. Your eyes flash through myriad colours, your clothes float and flutter as though caught in a wind, and when you move you leave the footprints of someone else. For the next day, the difficulty of all tasks you undertake is 0.

MINISTER

REQUIREMENT: Perform an act of great revenge in the name of Our Hidden Mistress, patron goddess of the Ministry.

REFRESH: Eliminate an enemy of the Ministry.

LOW

OUR LADY'S GRACE. [Divine] *You give more of yourself to Our Hidden Mistress in exchange for her protection.* Once per situation, after you take stress but before the GM rolls for fallout, you may elect to mark 1 stress to Mind. If you do, the GM does not roll for fallout, and you escape repercussions for now.

WHISPERS. [Divine] *The secret cant of the ministers extends communication.* +1 Mind. Mark 1 stress to Mind per participant in the group. You lead a group in a ritual that binds your voices to their Goddess, adorning each of their throats with a thumb-print of charcoal. For the next day, each member of the group can hear everything the other members say as though they were whispering it in their ear, no matter how far apart they are.

UNDO THE ANCIENT CURSE. [Divine] *You no longer fear the sun's kiss.* Gain the Resist skill. Mark 1 stress to Blood or Mind per participant in this ritual. For the next situation, those who take part in the ritual no longer suffer harm when exposed to sunlight.

SNUFF THE FALSE SUNS. [Divine] *You extinguish the light so your work may go unnoticed.* Gain the Sneak skill. Mark D3 stress to Mind or Silver and pour a vial of sanctified ink onto the ground. You extinguish all non-magical sources of light in the immediate area around you. Magical light is temporarily suppressed until you leave the area; sunlight is unaffected.

OUR MISTRESS' BLESSING. [Divine] *You can see clearly in the city's darkest corners.* Gain the Steal

skill. Mark 1 stress to Mind or Silver and adorn the subject's eyelids with sacred spireblack. When they close their eyes, they can see in absolute darkness as though the area was well-lit.

MEDIUM

TURN THE LIGHT. [Divine] *You hide someone from the faithless.* Mark D3 stress to Mind and make the sign of the goddess upon the subject's head. As long as the target of this rite remains stationary, they cannot be seen by anyone who is not devoted to Our Hidden Mistress.

SHADOWED SANCTUARY. [Divine] *You trap your foes in the darkness.* Anoint the walls of a room with spireblack pigment mixed with sacred oils and mark D3 Mind or Blood stress. Whenever someone tries to leave the room, you can roll Compel+Religion to stop them – on a success, they are knocked unconscious. You don't take stress from this roll.

RITE OF PERFECT GRACE. [Divine] *You cast away your identity in favour of a more useful one.* Mark D6 stress to cast this spell; you need twenty minutes, sacred ink collected from cephalopods that have never seen the sun's light, and someone tied up and gagged in your cellar. Press your thumbs into the ink and hold them over their eyelids until it dries; when it does, you will have a temporary cover identity that checks out against all but the strictest examination. That identity is based on but not identical to the person restrained at the centre of the ritual. If they're married, sell rare books and belong to the Vire club, you might end up as a divorced antiquarian who's a member of the Boating club. It's not exact.

Your paperwork and effects will shift and change to reflect your new identity; your friends and contacts will still know who you are, you haven't become an entirely new person – just, from a bureaucratic point of view, you count as one. The effects of the rite last until you cast it again; you can't choose to dispel it. (So: you can't get your "first" identity back. At least, not with this spell.)

HIGH

RITE OF CONVERSION. [Divine] *You burn your target's passions to ashes, and build faith to the Goddess in their place.* Having restrained a target, you delve deep into the recesses of their mind and rip their allegiances to shreds, replacing them with a slavish devotion to Our Hidden Mistress. At the end of this rite, the subject loves and will gladly die for the goddess. (It is considered good practice for magisters to have this rite cast upon them once a year.)

Unlike other divine spells, this requires a roll (Compel+Religion) to cast, and even if you succeed, you must mark D6 stress minimum after casting it. The subject also takes D6 stress to Mind. You have no intrinsic means of telling whether or not the spell has worked; you must subject the target to further tests to ensure their loyalty.

SOLAR DEVOTEE

REQUIREMENT: Make a devotional pilgrimage to the Solar Basilica, or to one of the many great temples to the Solar Pantheon in the frozen north.

REFRESH: Spend at least three hours in sunlight, the hotter the better (you don't have to have your skin exposed for this to work).

LOW

FATHER'S VIGOUR. [Divine] *Father Summer's bounty is without measure, and lends strength to the congregation.* +1 Blood. Mark D3 stress to Mind to cast this spell. At the culmination of a ten-minute ritual, you and each character nearby to you regain D3 Blood stress.

MOTHER'S BLESSING. [Divine] *The Mother's Mark is a sign of great craftsmanship and reliability.* +1 Mind. Mark D3 stress to cast this spell. You bless the tools, weapons or equipment of yourself or an ally during a half-hour ritual performed in total darkness. The first time they use those tools following the ritual, they roll with mastery, and this benefit lasts for the remainder of the situation or until they fail a roll using the equipment.

BROTHER'S EYE. [Divine] *You have joined a sect of anointed murderers.* Gain the Fight skill. Mark 1 stress to cast this spell. You anoint your weapon with sacred oils and bind the grip with dead leaves that crumble under your palm. For the next situation, when you inflict stress on a target in combat, inflict 1 additional stress.

MEDIUM

SISTER'S FIRE. [Divine] *Your body burns with the raw beauty of the Sister.* Mark D6 stress to cast this spell. Your palm glows with white-hot light that functions as a D8 damage weapon with the Piercing tag for the next situation. You can mark 1 stress per attack to give it the Ranged tag.

MOTHER'S CURSE. [Divine] *You damn a machine into inaction.* Mark D3 stress and point at a nearby item with moving parts, intoning the wrath of Mother Winter. For the remainder of the situation, that item no longer functions.

VIGILITE

REQUIREMENT: Join the fanatic cult of the Crimson Vigil, and destroy something or someone who would oppress you, in their name.

REFRESH: Destroy someone important (or something expensive) connected to your oppressors.

LOW

EYES OF LEKOLÉ. [Divine] *The Goddess' word is fire.* Mark 1 stress to Blood to immediately start a fire somewhere nearby with a whispered prayer to Lekolé.

SIGIL OF OUR WRATHFUL LADY. [Divine] *You transmute your body into a curse inflicted upon any aelfir that look upon it.* Mark D3 stress to Blood. You adorn your body with sanctified blood and oil in mind-warping sigils of the Red Goddess, including a large rune scratched into your chest. Any aelfir who looks upon you immediately takes 1 stress, and if you get close enough to touch them they take D3 stress as a matter of course. If you attack an aelfir while in this state, your attacks gain the Brutal tag.

LEKOLÉ'S INSIGHT. [Divine] *You know the secret rages people cradle in their hearts.* Once per situation, select an NPC. The GM must tell you what would make them angry right now.

MEDIUM

CRUCIBLE. [Divine] *You turn pain into yet more pain, returning it tenfold.* When your total stress is 6 or higher, your weapon dice increase in size by 1 step.

THE GODDESS' KISS. [Divine] *You pray to Lekolé, asking her for alms, but she is a cruel mistress.* When you plunge part of your body into flame, roll a D6. On a 1-3, take that much stress. On a 4-6, refresh that much stress.

HIGH

FORM OF THE GODDESS. [Divine] *You are fury incarnate.* Invoking forbidden prayers to the Red Goddess, you shift into a many-limbed wraith with eyes the colour of fire, towering over other drow. This process takes about a minute. In this form, you clutch burning swords of fire and blood (which are D8, Devastating weapons) and when you take stress to Blood, that stress is halved. This transformation lasts until the end of the current situation, at which point you take immediate severe Blood fallout.

THE VYSKANT

You have been infected with the living mantid disease that is the Vyskant, and you will serve alongside them to welcome the birth of your mother into the world in a beautiful cocoon of flesh.

REQUIREMENT: Visit the Cave and take the bloodsong into your body, whether willing or not. Alternatively, make contact with infected blood, but you get a Resist roll to resist the infection if that's the case.

REFRESH: Follow one of the mysterious orders you receive in dreams sent to you by the World-Mother. These include, but are not limited to: infecting a given person with your blood; hiding items in locations (for other infected to collect); counting the number of white crows you see land on a particular rooftop and then writing the number on a wall in chalk; or drowning a load of cats and dogs and burying them underneath the floorboards in the basement of a seemingly random house.

Unlike other abilities, you don't earn Vys abilities when you change the Spire. At the start of every session, the GM should roll a D10 and add 1 for each session that has passed without you gaining a Vys advance. If the result is 10 or more, you gain a random Vys advance.

Roll D10 on this table. If you already have the advance rolled, reroll until you get a new one.

1: BONE SPURS. With a gesture, you can summon (D3) weapons to your hands that are formed of your own bone made hard and sharp. If you spend 1 stress to Blood, these are D6 weapons insead.

2: HYPNOTIC SWEAT. Your sweat becomes a potent hallucinogen, but not one that lasts for any time once removed from the body, so it has to be licked off. It has no effect on you.

3: SKIN VIBRATION. You can talk to others by touching your skin to theirs and delivering minute, precise vibrations through transparent prehensile hairs. If they're also a Vys carrier, you can have a normal conversation in a matter of seconds; if they're not, you can only use words of a single syllable, and it takes place at a normal pace, and they can't respond.

4: REGENERATION. Eager mantid claws kindly knit your wounds together from the inside. At the start of each situation remove 1 stress from Blood.

5: SYNTHESIA. You can hear light, feel sound, taste with your feet and any other number of strange combinations of senses and inputs. You can mark 1 stress to Mind to avoid being blinded or deafened (or rendered unable to touch, taste or smell, if such a thing comes up) by rerouting the sensation through other channels.

6: CARAPACE. Your ribs fuse and harden into a single strong but flexible shell, giving you +1 Blood.

7: ALIEN CALM. You can no longer take stress to Mind, but you're not what most people would consider "normal" any more. You automatically pass Resist rolls to maintain control of your mind, but you can no longer cast spells that rely on marking Mind stress to cast.

8: AS ONE. When you and another Vys carrier interact against a third party, you do so with eerie precision. Once per situation, you can roll with mastery on any check as long as you're assisted by a fellow carrier.

9: UNEARTHLY SONG. You grow feathered nodules of bone in your throat that you can modulate to unleash a high-pitched, keening wail that causes nosebleeds, clouds vision, and makes animals flee. This counts as a D3 weapon with the Spread D6 and Devastating tags.

10: CHOOSE. You may choose any of the above powers.

COMBAT

Combat is handled as a conversation between players and the GM. The players describe their actions, whether they be movements, attacks etc. The GM then calls for specific rolls. Actions taken during combat are always considered challenging, and as such, are always rolled for.

MAKING ACTIONS IN COMBAT

Most commonly, when a player character makes an action in combat, the GM will ask for a roll to determine the outcome – combat is tense, difficult and dangerous, and nothing can be for certain. The most common skill that will allow a player to add dice to their pool is Fight, but other skills can be of use, too. Sneak can be rolled in place of Fight for assassinations; Pursue can be rolled to chase down a fleeing target, or evade a gang of enemies; Compel can be rolled to intimidate a foe into submission.

Domains apply as normal; the location in which the combat is being fought and the enemies being fought against will dictate which ones are appropriate. Fighting a magician in a university could use the Academic or Occult domains, for example; brawling with an officer of the city guard in the Silver Quarter could use High Society or Order. As ever, only one skill and one domain can be applied to any one roll, and it's up to the GM and player to determine which ones are appropriate.

Remember: the GM does not roll dice to determine the success or failure of NPC actions - instead, the players must roll to react to, counteract or avoid those actions. Generally speaking, NPCs don't take "turns" to act - their actions are woven into the fiction, and represented by the stress and fallout inflicted on player characters.

INITIATIVE

Spire doesn't use rounds and turns; like every other part of the game, combat is entirely narrative and time is flexible.

The GM chooses who attacks first. Normally it will be very obvious who gets priority in a combat, but if it is not, ask the group who they're most excited to watch fight first. After that person has acted, it's up to the GM to involve every player at the table – even if they're hanging back and trying to stay out of the fray.

If you want, you can just go clockwise around the table; you can pick the front-line fighter types first and cycle back to the others; you can ask the player who's just acted who they want to see act next; and so on. Pick a system and stick to it, and make sure that you're getting everyone involved.

However, there's no limit on how many times a player can act before others do; if it makes narrative sense for a character to act twice (say, pushing a guard down a flight of stairs and then holding a door shut to stop reinforcements from barrelling through it) then they can make the rolls one after another. Remember – every dice roll comes with the chance of taking stress, so more actions equals more risk.

RANGE

There are three ranges in Spire: melee, ranged, and extreme range. Melee is fighting toe-to-toe in the same room; ranged can reach between buildings, or down to the street from a rooftop; extreme range is anything further than that, assuming you can get line of sight to aim the shot.

If the players are outranged in a fight, they'll need to make an action to close on their enemies (or maybe more than one, depending on how far away they are) – Pursue to run in, Sneak to break line of sight and move stealthily, or Fight to lead a charge and take advantage of available cover.

If the players outrange their enemies, they have the drop on them; they'll take a maximum 1 stress per action until the enemies get close enough to use their weapons.

RELOADING

A lot of Ranged weapons have the Reload tag, and must be reloaded between shots as they only carry a small reservoir of ammunition. When a player declares that they're reloading, take the opportunity to describe the enemies using this weakness against them – circling round to get a shot in, making an attack against them, running off with some valuables, and so on. Players can make actions to avoid taking stress while they reload if it feels appropriate to do so.

ARMOUR

Armour provides additional resistance slots to Blood when attacked by something doing physical harm. Stress applied to the slots contributed by armour does not count towards total stress when checking for fallout, so armour makes an individual much hardier in combat. Stress marked to armour is removed at the end of the situation. Specific tags such as Piercing and Devastating deal stress that cannot be applied to these free slots as they ignore certain kinds of armour, making them especially deadly.

STRESS

Weapons generally apply their stress to Blood; however, don't be afraid to attack other resistances if appropriate. A hurled insult or spectacularly grand miss might harm Reputation, or a sneak-thief might make away with some Silver.

POST-FIGHT

The aftermath is a time to pick up the pieces and take stock of the situation. Remind players just how badly things went for them; describe the lingering effects of fallout suffered. Let them know, in narrative terms, how much stress they suffered and how close to death they came.

EXAMPLE FIGHT

Ganford (a Knight, played by Ziz), and Lozlyn (a Firebrand, played by Helen) have been trapped inside a tenement by the city guard. The GM is Dominic. After a brief debate about evidence and show trials, the pair decide to fight their way out.

DOMINIC: There are about four city guards; two on the street below aiming crossbows through the windows, and two who've just kicked in the door and are carrying clubs. Ganford, what do you do?

ZIZ: I'm going to rush forward and swing my greatsword at the one on the left. I've got Low Society and Fight, so that's three dice. [She rolls three D10s; her highest dice is a 9.]

DOMINIC: That's a hit! Roll damage.

[Ziz rolls a D8 and scores 6. The guard has 5 Resistance and 1 Armour. Subtracting from the Armour first, GM reduces the guard's resistance by the amount of stress that Ziz inflicted, bringing it to zero.]

DOMINIC: He's dead – you've just killed a police officer. What does it look like?

ZIZ: I guess he wasn't really expecting a Knight? So I charge at him and there's a look of fear in his eyes for a second, and then I plunge the greatsword

through his belly and drive him back against the wall.

DOMINIC: He sputters up some blood and dies on your blade; his mate shouts out: "Vennis!" and tackles you to the ground. Lozlyn, what's happening?

HELEN: I'm gonna shoot him with my revolver.

DOMINIC: Cool, okay. As you do, the two guards outside spot you through the window and open fire.

HELEN: [Rolls 3 D10s; her highest dice is a 6.] Not good enough.

DOMINIC: You still hit, but you're going to take some stress yourself. Roll your damage first.

[Helen rolls a D6 and gets a 3.]

DOMINIC: It's dark. You snap off a shot into the melee and you think you hit something, but it's hard to tell what – Ganford, you feel the guard's blood run down his arm and into your armour, but he's still going on adrenaline. Also, the windows shatter as crossbow bolts streak through them. Let me roll damage…

[He rolls a D6 and gets a 4. Applying 4 stress to Lozlyn's Blood resistance, he rolls a D10 to check for fallout; he gets a 6, so she's okay for now.]

DOMINIC: You manage to throw yourself into cover, and you're not hit by the crossbow bolts, but you do get winded by the impact of hitting the deck, and your ears are ringing from the gunshot. Ganford, what do you do?

ZIZ: I'm gonna throw this guy off me, drag myself to my feet and swing my sword at him. [She rolls three dice; her highest is a 4.] That's not enough, is it?

DOMINIC: Not by a long shot. You can't swing your sword properly in here, and it's heavy. It has the Tiring tag, so you'll reduce the stress dice attached to it by 1 step – it does D6 stress now until the end of the situation. Also, he clubs you in the arm for… [He rolls a D3, and gets a 3.] 3 damage. Which is entirely soaked by your Armour, reducing its value to 0 until you get out of the fight, but you're unharmed. Lozlyn?

HELEN: I'm gonna rush forward and knock this guy off balance before he does Ganford any more harm. [She rolls 3 dice; her highest is a 7.] So I hit him, right?

DOMINIC: Yeah, you do. You've got a knife, right?

HELEN: You bet.

DOMINIC: Okay, roll stress as though you were using the knife; no reason you should roll less because you wanted to describe yourself doing something cool.

[Helen rolls a D3 and gets 3.]

DOMINIC: You shove him off-balance, but you're going to take stress. [He rolls a D3 and gets 2, adding it to Lozlyn's Blood stress, then checks for fallout again. This time, he rolls a 5, so she suffers fallout. Given that her total current Blood stress is 7, that means it's Moderate fallout. He reduces her stress by 5 as she received Moderate fallout.] As you knock him off-balance, you both fall out of the door – and down the stairs. He pulls himself to his feet groggily, and you look down at your arm: it's broken, and you feel your stomach lurch as you see bone jutting out of the skin.

HELEN: Ugh.

DOMINIC: Indeed. Ganford, you're up!

DISTRICTS AND FACTIONS OF ACADEMIA

THE BENEVOLENT ORDER OF WISDOM AND DISCOVERY

"No-one should go without knowledge," proclaim the cries of the street-lecturers that cluster outside the Benevolent Order, "for through knowledge we can better understand the perfect creation of the gods, and in that act, become closer to their majesty! Come one, come all, and receive the unimaginable blessing of wisdom for no charge to yourselves! Education, prosperity, and piety for all!"

The Benevolent Order of Wisdom and Discovery is a free school, offering lessons in a wide variety of subjects taught by enthusiastic volunteers that range from practical concerns, such as basic reading and writing or simple mathematics, to advanced courses in theoretical biology and applied theology.

It is a front for no small number of shadowy organisations, many of which are even aware of the existence of some of the others; it is hard to find a school that isn't a recruitment agency for a dark cult, insidious conspiracy or apocalypse cabal, so students in the know do their best to learn what they can and get out before they're roped into murdering a city official or sacrificing a blind gutterkin on an altar of the hungry deep. Some of them even manage to succeed in doing so.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE UNLIDDED EYE

Demonology is a banned magick throughout all of Spire, and in fact throughout any land the aelfir have dominion over – they view it as an utter aberration, an uncontrollable force of un-nature that has the capacity to rip the world in twain if not properly controlled. Demonologists, if found, are carted off to specially-built prison cells where they await processing, and few are ever seen again.

(Of course, the reports that the aelfir are using demonic incursions as a weapon of war in Far Nujab, and elsewhere, should be regarded as rank anti-authoritarian propaganda peddled by drow separatists.)

Which makes the business of the Brotherhood all the more dangerous, because their business is demons, and the summoning thereof. They operate as a multilayered and almost entirely unknowable series of outer circles, inner circles, cabals and conclaves, each layer forswearing all knowledge of the one above it but doing everything they can to enter it. Whether or not there's a top level of authority within the

organisation or if the whole thing keeps spiraling and cycling through endless levels, generated by an unseen hand, remains to be seen.

The Brotherhood specialises in assassination, smear campaigns, blackmail and threatening families, but not in the actual casting of spells – their demonology is almost entirely theoretical, perhaps because they are aware of how dangerous the whole affair is. The dark arts taught are supported with a selection of classes concerning aetherics, practical occultism, applied sociology and arcanomechanics, making it a solid choice for poor, if gifted, intellectuals if they can withstand the fallout of black magic. Those who enter the organisation find it very hard to leave, even once their time as a student is over, and no end of well-to-do drow owe some terrible favours to the Brotherhood.

THE SISTERHOOD OF ILLUMINATION

This off-shoot of the Church of Our Glorious Lady preaches that the light she shines through the world is represented not only by perceptible moonlight but the spread of information and understanding. Students take frequent trips to New Heaven or the Sky Docks to bathe themselves in the light of the full moon, and thus absorb the wisdom that she shines down.

They, too, are demonologists, but as a matter of practicality rather than the occult darkness of the Brotherhood of the Unlidded Eye – they view demonology as knowledge, like any other, and to occlude or forbid knowledge on the grounds that it is dangerous is sacrilege. They have been at war with the Brotherhood for the last twenty years, infiltrating and subverting their complex hierarchies, and the Brotherhood have undertaken a series of brutal reprisals leaving many high-ranking members of the Sisterhood dead, pinned to their desks head-first with ceremonial nails.

THE COLLEGE OF THE UNDYING LIGHT

Between the Brotherhood and the Sisterhood stands the College of the Undying Light, a beacon of hope funded in part by the Solar Church of the aelfir. The college operates on the principle that the cosmos and everything in it is a single godly being, or aspects thereof, centered on the great sun that provides heat, light and growth to the planet. With this understood, all knowledge and learning – all art and poetry – is but the god-being speaking to itself, better understanding the majesty that it has wrought. They adore knowledge, especially mathematics and physics, and work closely with the retroengineers in Gywnn-Enforr to better understand the mysteries dug up from the arcologies of those who came before. They have been working to calm the tensions within the district, collaborating with the Brotherhood and Sisterhood as arbitrators and diplomats.

They are a bunch of lying, scheming demonologists.

They, and the Brotherhood of the Unlidded Eye, and the Sisterhood of Illumination, have either been infiltrated and subverted by or always were a front for illegal high elf demonology research, and those showing particular promise in all three branches are siphoned off to perform experiments in hidden, reinforced back-rooms and magically-occluded test chambers. Many of them aren't aware of the true nature of their studies – their aelfir overseers endeavour to keep the sum totality of the knowledge out of the hands of any one researcher, instead dividing the process up into siloed work-groups that, on their own, do not possess the ability to summon a military-grade incursion. It is slow going, but the aelfir are long-lived, and time is something they have plenty of.

ON DEMONOLOGY

The gnolls, far to the south, beyond the realm of Far Nujab in their capital city of Al'Marah, have mastered the art of demonology to such an extent that it powers the majority of their civilisation. Djinn (as they call demons), conjured up through lenses of coloured glass and metal, are bound into brass spheres that emit endless heat, that can spin and hover under their own power, and can be unleashed as bright, destructive explosives.

The drow haven't openly used demonology for many centuries, but when they did, they did so through the use of ancient enchanted items known as eidolons: the Kraken Bell that hangs over the North Docks; the Chaos Heart that beat arrhythmic within the chest of the nineteenth Sorcerer-King of Gryndel and was destroyed by the hero known as Unquiet; or the Knife, which could slit the throats of gods and realities alike.

The aelfir have uncovered the arts of demonology from... somewhere, perhaps from captured gnolls during their wars, perhaps from an ancient goddess awakening beneath the everfrost to the north, perhaps from deranged human retroengineers driven out of their communities. Theirs is a summoning circle of flesh and blood, inscribed on the soul of unwitting

RULES FOR DEMONOLOGY

If, for some reason, you come into possession of the means of summoning a demonic incursion of any size, the materials needed to cast the spell are either tremendously rare, costly, or both. It will be difficult to cast successfully, but should you succeed, every living being in the immediate area around the caster, and the caster themselves (unless they are focusing their power through a conduit, as is done in the military) are dead. Or: worse than dead. The more powerful the spell, the wider the area affected. You have no control over the spell once it is cast, but it is unheard of to maintain an open rift for more than a minute. For more details on demonology, consult the *Black Magic* sourcebook.

Unleashing a demonic incursion is one of the worst things a person can do, and most wouldn't wish it on their enemies. Watching it happen from a distance requires a Resist+Occult check with D8 Mind stress on a failure, and D6 on a success.

BRAZACOTT TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

Brazacott is an organisation run in part from up-Spire funding, relying on volunteer work from "proper" universities to teach classes in engineering, information theory, sociology and biology among a wide variety of other subjects. The students are noted for quickly grasping difficult concepts with ease, as well as adopting a singular sense of fashion – grey scholarly robes and trousers, white head-wraps and dark glasses.

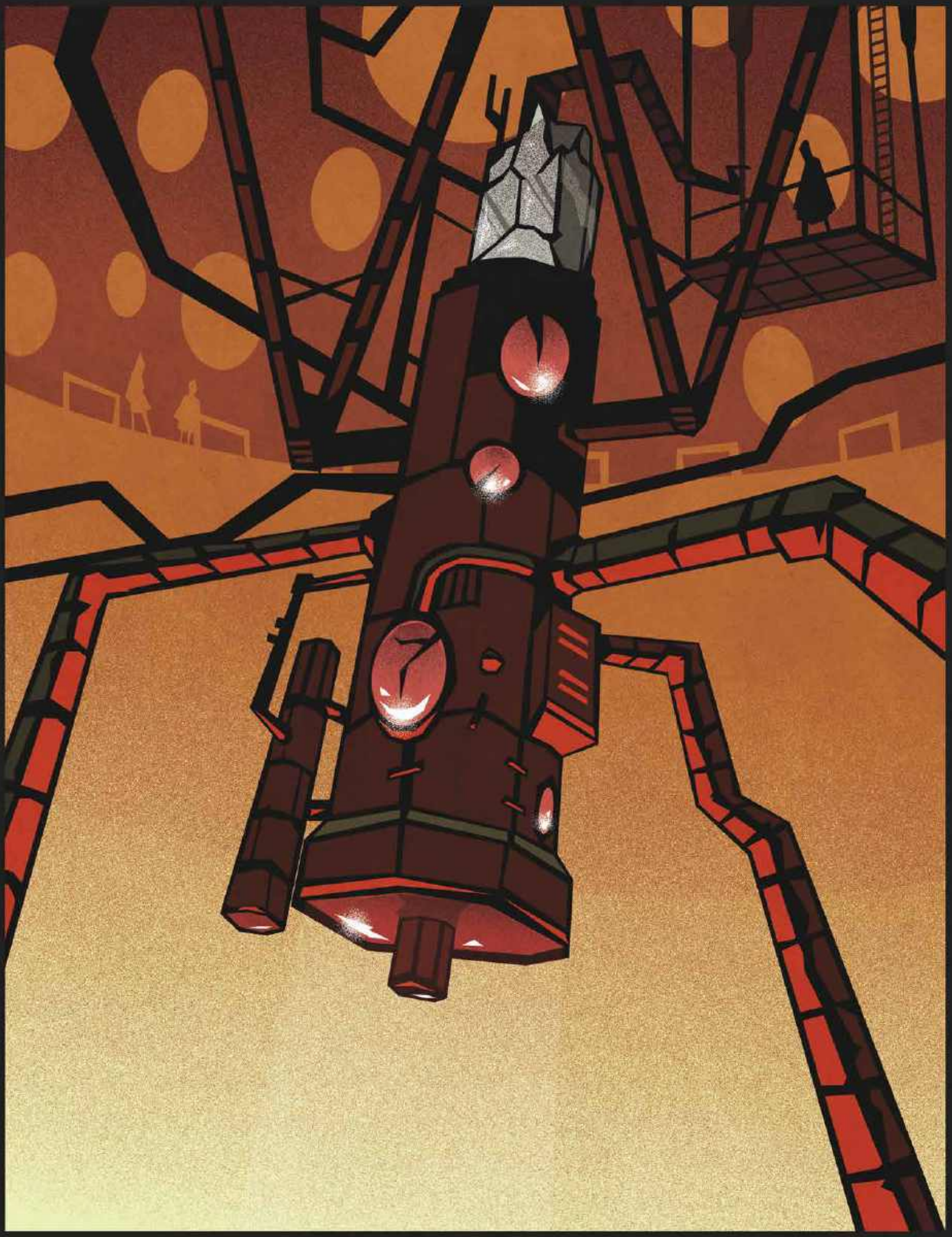
It is a front, of course. All the decent schools under the umbrella of the Benevolent Order are – but not for dark magic or forbidden religions, but for a group of academics that bear implants of ancient crystal unearthed from an arcology by human delvers in the recent past. These implants, driven into the mass of the subject's brain, amplify their thought processes and allow them to communicate between each other without the use of words, and over great distances, by utilising the strange vibrations of the crystal shards.

Some students undergo the process willingly – others are forced into it, and roped into the scheme whilst unconscious. The main crystal from which the implants are chipped is known to its followers, if you can call them such a thing, as The Intelligence – an experiment in long-distance communication and information storage by those who came before, and an unknowable intellect in and of itself. In the times before, humans theorise, each arcology would have a crystal node such as this – or several, in the case of larger arcologies – which would allow the inhabitants to share information and communicate instantly over distances of hundreds of miles using glass scrying-cabinets.

INTELLIGENCE SHARDS

If you receive a shard of the Intelligence as a brain implant, on the off-chance it doesn't kill you, you gain access to all domains via the linked neural net of your fellows. Each time you use a domain that you have not earned through normal means, roll a Resist+Academia check and mark D6 stress to Mind on a failure and D3 stress to Mind on a partial success.

In addition, an uplifted member may commune with The Intelligence itself to try and discern a particular piece of knowledge, but it is dangerous to do so as mortal minds were not meant to interact on such a fundamental level with the crystal. You may ask the GM a question – any question whatsoever – and spend D6 days in deep communion with The Intelligence during which time you will be rendered insensible in a cataconic, ecstatic trance. (You must recruit other people to give you water and food during your trance, otherwise you will die from dehydration or starvation. At the end of the trance, you lose one stress slot in Mind – if you don't have any, you suffer immediate severe fallout. You now know the answer to the question.



Unable to restore the scrying-cabinets to working order, and finding that most of the other crystal nodes were taken or destroyed when the ancient race who built them fled these lands, the humans have instead resorted to adapting the substances to resonate within the folds of the brains of intelligent creatures. Each carrier acts as an input to a great network, itself possessing knowledge that is far beyond the ken of even the most ingenious human retroengineer, and with each uploaded mind the organisation comes closer to unlocking more and more ancient secrets.

The implanted (or "Uplifted," as they call themselves) say that the resonance of the crystal in their brains can be strange, at first, and lead to nosebleeds, nightmares, hallucinations, and memory holes – but when they work in concert with one another, or commune with the great overmind, the sensation is one akin to spiritual ecstasy.

THE HIGH ELVEN UNIVERSITY OF DIVINE MAGIC

The University of Divine Magic is considered by many aelfir to be the pinnacle of their civilisation to date. It is formed of a sprawling alabaster campus, laid out to some forgotten diagram lost in one of the many libraries; in places, classrooms and laboratories are packed together five or six high on top of each other with precarious marble stairways connecting walkways and corridors between them, or on occasion connecting nothing in particular and spiralling away into the ceiling. In other areas, large open plazas with fountains and seating areas overflow with students and professors sitting in cafes, sipping Nujabian kafee and arguing over the latest treatise on the divine. Merely finding your way from one side of the university to the other is considered an achievement worthy of praise, and accurate maps (which are rare) are sold to desperate, lost undergrads at vastly overinflated prices.

THE GRAND TELESCOPE, INVERTED

Using their own ingenious scrying techniques and the cunning machine-work of the humans, the aelfir commissioned the building of a mighty telescope soon after their invasion of Spire was complete. Positioned atop the university, the enormous device allowed scholars to peer into the heavens and uncover the secrets hidden there – not only to follow and perhaps predict the seemingly pre-ordained paths the stars carve through the cosmos, but to observe the movements of the curious creatures that live their lives far above the world.

Star-swifts, flitting and ephemeral, that come with the dusk and peck at the embers of the sunset; ascended skywhales, pallid and enormous, that shed the bonds of earth and eat only the strange fruit that grows on the lower-hanging strands of nebulae; and the moon-elves, black-eyed and frail, who communicate by searing glyphs into the night sky with smouldering biophosphorescence.

(And that is not to mention the beings witnessed up there whose very existence is cause for fierce debate. What of the impossibly huge void behemoths that create the shifting dark behind the stars and whose eyes hold supernovae? What of the angels electric, who manifest in afterimages in the eye after a lightning strike? What of those researchers who have gone irrevocably mad, their eyes burned out to blackened sockets, who report they have looked directly upon the faces of the Solar Pantheon or the Glorious Lady herself?)

But: a small yet influential cadre of professors grew tired of spending their nights staring into the skies to view the celestial, and instead argued that there was more to be learned by focusing their energies on earthbound supernatural phenomena. And so, at great cost to the university, the telescope was inverted and pointed directly, more or less, into the heart of Spire.

Now, ranks of researchers spend day after day scanning the depths of the city in which they live and formulating theories on why there is a weeping, ragged hole in reality at the centre of it. A popular proposal is that chaos and disorder is the natural state of all things, and the structure of Spire is in the grand scheme of things far less natural than an otherworldly force of corruption, and the Heart is just trying to address the balance. Or: it is the corpse of a god, and where gasses escape from its decomposing body, reality comes undone; or it is an escaped and mad demon trying to work its way back into whatever nightmare realm from which it originated; or it is an attempt by ancient drow sorcerer-kings to contain the full extent of the curse that damns their race, and should it ever become breached completely, every drow will die a grisly death.

None of these theories are correct.

THE INFINITE LIBRARY

The Infinite Library is a halo that encompasses the centre of the institution – a vast vertical circle visible for miles around. It is not actually infinite, though the aelfir that use it like to think that it is, and it is a popular exercise in Paralogical Thought classes for a student to know that the library is finite but to believe that it is infinite simultaneously.

Through clever use of architecture and its proximity to the arcane energies of the lunar font, it is actually a loop – keep walking long enough and you will end up near where you began. The library is constructed on the inside of a Möbius strip, and the single path wends its way through badly-ordered shelves crammed with the religious texts of every faith known to Spire. The divine truths of prophets and madmen clog the shelves like driftwood damming a river.

THE LUNAR FONT

Held in the centre of the Infinite Library is the Lunar Font: one of the greatest workings of the aelfir. Indeed, the Library itself seems to have originally been simply a support structure for the colossal array of lenses and fractured glass all focussing light from outside of Spire to a single point. Here, moonlight is physically distilled and tempered, drip by agonisingly slow drip, in miniscule vials coated in thick layers of spireblack to contain the light. The brightest moonlight of a summer night produces barely half a drop of this sacred liquid; during the day the window high in Spire's wall is firmly shuttered but at night it is thrown open, regardless of weather or other external conditions, all in the hope of gaining a little more distilled essence of the divine.

Half of this substance is shipped to the Solar Basilica where it is used in worship by aelfir mystery cults – an utterly profane act to the drow. The other is transferred to New Heaven to the waiting hands of the Guild of Morticians who use it in the creation of undying; it lends an impetus for the stilled blood of the patients to move once more, dragged through their bodies by the energies of the moon far above rather than pumped by their now-absent heart.

THE CULT OF THE SPIRE ASCENDANT

The city of Spire, the cult claims, was a god, and then it died, and the aelfir are living in its corpse. Or: Spire is a god, but it is not yet born. Or: it is a living bridge to the realm of the gods. Or: it is a god, and it is dormant, and must be awoken. (Or: not awoken, never awoken, unless you want the world to end. But some people do.)

The Spire Ascendant is a loose collection of academics and theologians that believe Spire is the physical form, dead or alive or both, of a deity of some kind. (It certainly bears no similarity to works created by any mortal hand on record.) What unites them is a desire to bring Spire to life once more and sit upon its right hand as angels or prophets, and they have support that ranges all the way to the Council itself.

INTERVIEW ROOMS

The interview rooms of the University are renowned throughout Spire and, indeed, the world. Here, great advances in medicine and psychology take place every day – what most do not know however is the nature of the rooms themselves, and what lives inside them. Built of iron, stone, and glass, each cell is the pinnacle of containment technology – often built specifically to contain the occupant if special needs must be met, using blessed moonsilver, specially-reinforced sandwalker leather, thrice-cursed hornwood or any other variety of natural or supernatural defences. Mutant creatures, intelligent gutterkin, grotesque spiders, pureblood midwives, no small number of drow, gnolls and other horrors are contained here. They are subjected to tests, tortures, interrogations and procedures every day of their extended lives. Notwithstanding the cruelty inflicted upon them, much is learned from their suffering, and aelfir can only barely understand the concept of cruelty when applied to lesser races than themselves.

THE BATTLEFIELD

You don't go to the Battlefield unless you're called. (Or the Front, or the Trenches, or whatever your form tutor calls it.) What started out as an innocent prank twenty-five years ago (which saw the sleep-mask of Professor Westward-March-The-Faithful swapped out for his professional mask, leading to the high elf equivalent of him turning up before the board in his pyjamas) has escalated into all-out war between factions of students and allied fraternities, claiming the area of the campus between the dorm of the original perpetrators and Professor Westward's office as a battleground.

Now, the no-man's land is mainly used as a place to posture and wave illegally-owned swords and pistols about without raising too much fuss – these are students and teaching assistants, not soldiers and gangsters, after all. But when the wine flows freely

– as it does in the quarterly festivals to celebrate the changing hierarchy of the solar pantheon – then the halls ring out with screams and gunshots as old scores are dragged up to be re-settled, and the campus security guards know well enough to leave the entire area alone.

It is rumoured that a weathered and scarred Professor Westward-March-The-Faithful, forever embittered by the shame of presenting in his sleep-mask, leads one of the factions in exacting a bloody revenge.

STUDENTS

Names: Jenkins, Serren, De Havilland
Descriptors: Already bleeding, Visibly drunk, Fighting to impress someone they fancy
Difficulty: All the gear, no idea. Difficulty 0
Resistance: 3, but they move in large-ish groups for safety
Equipment: Daddy's spare duelling pistol (D6, Accurate, Ranged, Piercing, Reload) or Mummy's old cavalry sabre (D6)

THE LECTURE HALL

The Lecture Hall (and there are of course many lecture halls in the university, but this is "The" Lecture Hall) is a single colossal theatre where new theories and findings are explained to the learned elite of the university. Seating comfortably 6,000 students and professors (and 7,500 uncomfortably), a minor miracle of acoustics allows each attendant to hear the speaker as clearly as if they were sat next to each other.

Attempting to book the lecture hall is another matter entirely, subject as it is to bureaucracy even more arcane than the rest of the campus; lectures are booked out for at least the next decade, and many of them are taking place simultaneously. The de facto keeper of the timetable is a diminutive drow servant known as Pao, currently serving four concurrent durances for reasons she deigns not to mention; the stress of the job has driven her quite mad, leaving her terrified of sudden movements, changes in temperature, loud noises or the wrong colour of ink, let alone the predations of vicious aelfir professors attempting to shoehorn their class into an already over-booked slot. She subsists almost entirely on sickly-sweet paste sucked out of tubes, which has rotted her teeth away to black stumps.

Many students study at other universities in Spire hoping one day to acquire the qualifications needed to study scheduling at the University of Divine Magic.

THE ACADEMY OF GYWNN-ENFORR

A home away from home for many of the human retroengineers that ply their trade in Spire, the Academy of Gywnn-Enforr is a nexus for the development of prokatakos technology. Unearthed from ancient arcologies deep beneath the earth, these curious machines are examined and broken down into their component parts in an effort to understand their inner workings.

THE COMPUTATIONAL DIVISION

Humans believe that machines can think for themselves. The aelfir regard this as nonsense, and the drow treat it with a sort of wary disbelief, but the humans have pulled it off – in no part thanks to the discovery of The Intelligence, a vast prokatakos crystal that resonates in such a way as to allow it to process information.

The Computational Division is largely a front for the cult of The Intelligence – humans who implant the crystal into the flesh of their brains and become living data-nodes – who are detailed more fully in the Brazacott Technical Institute on page 83. Those who aren't ready to sink mysterious ancient rocks into their still-living brains are attempting to build devices that allow them to read the information processed by the crystal on scrying mirrors, but successes are few and far between, and the hivemind of the cult is difficult to fight against.

VOLATILITY RESEARCH

Little is understood about the strange human technology known as galvanics; fizzing, sparking devices that hum and glow with unnatural colours are tethered to machines and power them with buzzing energy. (The methods for gathering galvanic energy are many, and all of them unreliable, but capturing lightning in copper and glass stacks or rapidly striking specially-treated amber against itself to create sparks are the main two.)

At present, galvanic energy is a fringe science that many humans regard as an amusing toy; they are, as a culture, much more concerned with the serious business of mass production, and constructing ever-more elaborate devices that run on steam power. But, of

late, galvanics has seen something of an upsurge in popularity, and several noted scientists within the Volatility Research department are in talks with the aelfir paymasters of the army to create weapons that harness this unusual energy source.

LITTLE WHITECROSS

Whitecross is the human centre of commerce and religion – a huge arcology built within a hollowed-out mountain far to the west where, centuries ago, the race first made their forays into the secrets that lie beneath the earth. In Little Whitecross, human-themed inns and bars ply their trade to an eager crowd, and the latest entertainments from the west are performed on a nightly basis.

Currently popular are: a semi-improvised comedic play concerning the trials and tribulations of the Wanderer-King Marazion the Wastrel; experimental galvanic projections of light accompanied by traditional drums and pipes; and Cross, a hugely-complicated human sport, that sees teams of cunning players don protective suits and carry "non-lethal" firearms to compete in competitive recreations of famous historic battles.

THE TOWER DIVISION

There are many who believe that Spire itself is of prokatakos make, and the argument holds water (even if it bares little architectural similarity to other forerunner structures). So the Tower Division seeks to understand the true nature of the giant building, and perhaps apply this knowledge to research in other fields.

The Tower Division, therefore, makes frequent trips into the Heart, arguing that the structure of the city is either generating it or containing it, and pays handsomely for those who would guard its members through the surrounding lawless districts and guide them through the maddening, nonsensical geography of the Heart itself. They have an impressively high turnover rate (with many members ending up dead, mad or both after their first trip down-Spire), and so far, their efforts have been fruitless. Were it not for the ceaseless campaigning of Professor Arkwright, who has very nearly completed his decade-long project of research into the hole in reality, the division would have folded long ago.

DISTRICTS AND FACTIONS OF COMMERCE

THE NORTH DOCKS

The Knights run the North Docks. In ages past, the Knightly Order of St Beneferas swore to protect traders, travellers and strangers with their lives, and in recognition of this, the Council of Spire saw fit to give them dominion over the river docks, so they could better serve their people.

Now, no-one would recognise St Beneferas if he walked down the high street. The Knights are a quarrelling cadre of enforcers, extortionists and brawlers who dress up in gaudy armour, pay too much money for expensive broadswords (that they are legally allowed to carry, thanks to that ancient pact) and like to throw their weight around when it comes to tithe collection, perceived slights against their honour, and contests of "Knightly" virtue.

The Knights display their servitude and allegiances (which shift from season to season) on their property, armour and even their skin with brightly-coloured pennants and standards, proclaiming who they work for, who they've beaten up (recently or in misty legend), who their dad beat up when he was a lad, their personal crest, and – importantly – the markings of the Duke, who rules them.

The docks are a spray of colour and noise against the grey stillness of the Spire wall, with boats docking carrying trade goods from far lands, drunken sailors blowing their wages in Knight-run alehouses, informal jousts and melees, and the sort of round-the-clock mayhem that a traveller can really get behind.

KNIGHTS

Names: Lookshy, Quince, Junkett

Descriptors: Swaying on their feet from the rum, More gaps than teeth when they grin, Collects trophies from soldiers they beat up and displays them proudly

Difficulty: 0 on the street, 1 if you take them on after a few drinks in their pub

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Knight quarter-plate (Armour 3), a collection of swords, lances, morning-stars etc (D6, Brutal), the occasional cheap dunnock pistol or sawn-off sparrowhawk shotgun (D6, Ranged, One-shot)

THE DUKE

"The Duke" is a hereditary title, usually passed on to whoever killed the last Duke and got away with it. To save money and time, the Duke's heraldry stays the same between occupants, and making changes to it – however small – is often frowned upon by everyone aside from the Guild of Crestmakers, who appreciate the business.

The present Duke used to go by the name of Westfall, and she's a drow with a strong Home Nations accent she tries her best to hide. As is tradition for drow

women, she has taken many spouses throughout her life – she has two current husbands, both of whom are big, strong lads she reckons are far too stupid to ever try and overthrow her, and a human wife who goes by the name of Duchess. The Duchess very much enjoys being the power behind the throne, although it must be said that which throne she's behind seems to be of little concern to her.

THE CASTLE

An enormous decommissioned human military paddle-steamer, retro-fitted with luxurious interior apartments and down-powered weaponry acceptable to the Duke's aelfir paymasters (she could still level a street or two with the firepower at her disposal, mind). The Castle houses the Knights' coffers, heaving with tribute, carefully guarded by the Duchess' personal guard – hard-eyed men and women bristling with guard dogs, semi-legal firearms, and military-grade armour.

The castle is there primarily because, as laid out in the order's original provision, their protection of the north docks extends to the rivers that surround them, and as such they form the entirety of Spire's navy. What was once a fleet of proud ships has been sold off and repurposed into impromptu pub extensions over the centuries, and now, aside from the Castle, the official navy of Spire is thirty (sturdy) rowboats, three gun-skiffs and a cannon that hasn't been fired in sixty years.

THE RANGE

Originally, the Range was a row of thirty houses either side of a winding backstreet. Enterprising Knight Wesley bought out the entire neighbourhood for a suspiciously low price nine years ago and knocked out every non-supporting interior wall, forming one of the largest contiguous interior spaces in the docks. Wesley went on to rename it the Range, set up a bar on either side of the street, and hold the district's famous jousts down the alley in the centre.

(Horses are unfashionable and expensive in Spire, so jousts are normally performed on foot. Both parties strap on their shiniest armour and a pair of heavy gauntlets, get blind drunk, and run as fast as they can towards each other in an attempt to knock the other party over.)

Also popular in the Range, now a popular night spot even with mid-Spire customers and boasting several viewing bridges built between the houses – are archery contests (duels fought with blunted crossbow bolts), melee (a drawn-out and gruelling battle for territory, with teams looking to force each other backwards) and Desang, a new and exciting school of theatre that boasts fights to the first blood in every show, often with branching plots depending on which character wins.

THE SUNDERED BELL

In ages past, the drow possessed seven strange bells which, in times of dire need, would be rung to summon the kraken – a dark and terrifying mass of tentacles and fanged maws that would burst from the seas and rivers to strike at their foes. Modern scholars have drawn comparisons between ancient depictions of the kraken and the effect that demonological weapons have when used on military targets.

(A cult in the docks worships the lost kraken as a god, or rather infinite multi-faceted gods, of the river and ocean. They claim that their god is dead, but that he will rise again like the tidal waters of the docks, and they scrape through mud and river-water to uncover relics of their deity – mirrored scales, obsidian-black teeth, strange and jagged bones – that will appear with increasing frequency as his resurgence nears.)

When the aelfir took Spire, there was only one bell remaining in the city (the others by then were lost or protecting other parts of the drow empire) and, even though it no longer seemed to work, the Warrior-Poet New-Rivers-Broken demanded that it was split into two pieces and displayed in the North Docks as a symbol of the invaders' power.

SOLACE

A temporary home for the needy and abused, set up by a nameless and mysterious donor from up-Spire. Operating with medicine and care of a surprisingly high standard, Solace is a secular operation (a rarity in the Spire) with no apparently ulterior motive – no sinister cult, no organ harvesting operation on the side, no sacrificial altar in the basement, not even a shadowy recruitment agency for one of the many secret societies that scurry around behind the scenes of day-to-day-life. Even the Ministry haven't been able to find any dirt on it yet, which must mean that whoever's in charge of Solace is very good at hiding their sins.

THE HEAP

A filthy nailed-together pile of leaking boats and improvised rafts, filled with drifters and thieves, secretly run by a trio of vicious gnoll enforcers and a gang

of unusually violent bioluminescent gutterkin with webbed feet and anglerfish mouths.

The Heap is docked just outside of the Spire's city limits, and repeated attempts to cut it loose or burn it down have been met with brutal reprisals from the normally placid inhabitants, spurred on as they are by their gnoll masters' threats. Should those up-Spire ever get wind of the true nature of the Heap – that it houses degenerate abhumans – its destruction will be assured, so the gnolls keep tight control over who gets in and out.

There are safer places than the north docks for a gnoll to hide, though, so it can be safely assumed that they're up to something in the centre of the creaking, festering mess, protected by a rag-tag army of burn-outs and junkies.

HEAP DENIZENS

Names: Wazim, Ruchol, Fingers
Descriptors: A goblin with visible trepanning scars, An injured soldier bearing tarnished medals, A scabby half-gnoll in rags
Difficulty: 0
Resistance: 3
Equipment: Rusty, filthy knives (D3, Ongoing D3)

THE HIGH STREET

Towering over the interior of the dock, the High Street is built into the roof of the area (and therefore is among the few places that never get flooded). Here, catwalks connect family businesses and semi-permanent market stalls, selling exotic trade goods from overseas, clockwork, relics, pet megacorvids, books, atlases, globes, walking sticks, fine fur coats and mementos of Spire for travellers to purchase.

Ownership of the catwalks, which are not technically part of the docks, is a toss-up between Sir Grigori, a rangy drow with a missing eye and a mean streak a mile wide, and Sergeant Holt of the Free Watchmen.

It's not uncommon to see a member of either side pitched over the railing and tumble down into the water below or, if they're unlucky, head-first into the deck of a riverboat.

SANDERSON'S ARMS

Sanderson, a human ex-Knight (although you never really leave) has served his community and his Duke for the last twenty years by operating a reliable weapons store. Nailed to the pub sign outside his front door are his two original taxidermied arms, the skin and tattoos long-faded from exposure, and in their place he boasts two replacement arms – grey-white and hugely muscled – studded down their length with black market drow sliver technology.

Out front, he sells crossbows, shortbows, shortswords, clubs, brass knuckles and knives to any that want them. In back, his role of official arms provider to the Knights allows him to purchase and distribute military-grade swords and armour to those with the right to bear such arms (and those with enough money to convince him to look the other way).

Underneath his shop, though, he runs a stellar trade in illegal firearms, ranging from discount Red Row Specials to surplus military Legrand rifles to barely-held-together experimental Thunderfires from the academy in Gywnn-Enforr. No-one has ever tried to shut him down; he's just too useful to the Knights, and he's a scary customer to boot.

THE CARMINE SCEPTRE

Between a slaughterhouse and the water's edge, where the river runs red with offal and blood and strange lumps float to the surface, the Carmine Sceptre holds dominion. Famously regarded as one of the roughest, dirtiest bars in the Docks – which is quite the title – the Sceptre holds an order of Knights made up exclusively of women. With their trademark brand of tooth-shattering brutality, the Sceptre offer blanket protection to all women fleeing abuse – whether they were beaten by their husbands (which is one of the more common reasons for seeking sanctuary), refugees from the civil wars of Ys, on the run from the law, or dodging a Durance at the hands of a cruel aelfir master.

Most of the Knights in the order once sought sanctuary themselves. As part of the payment for their protection, the Sceptre expects every woman present to learn how to fight and defend themselves (as well as to extort money from the local populace and rough up merchants who look like they're carrying too much silver), and many of them go on to join the order in later life. As such, where many knightly orders are fronted by tall, handsomely-scarred looking men, the order of the Carmine Sceptre is led and staffed almost entirely by broad-shouldered, middle-aged, impossibly violent women and their equally violent children. They have a reputation as Knights-for-hire, willing to perform almost any job you can pay them for, and they have few qualms about who gets hurt in the bargain.

At present the order, and thus the bar, is managed by a one-eyed woman called Mogs who is built like the building's front door – old, square, thick and heavily scarred but as yet unbroken.

THE LAST LEG

The Last Leg has never once paid for their beer. This is a matter of pride, and they declare it proudly, often whilst drinking stolen beer.

Formed from the worst that the North Docks has to offer – ex-pirates, scoundrels, brigands, vagabonds, and so on – and run by the indolent and immobile Captain Porter, the Last Leg operates out of the river itself, built as it is into the half-sunken wreck of a once-proud ship. The prow of the boat points up towards the sky, and the order has rebuilt the internal sections (and jury-rigged platforms onto the exterior) whilst maintaining a loose collection of yachts and rowboats around the central structure like a shanty town.

The Order of the Last Leg is universally loathed by every other Knightly order in their vicinity on account of their acquisitions procedure – once every few days, when the beer has run out and the gang is down to their last dregs of rum, they'll detach the armada of small boats from the bar and set sail in search of plunder on nearby trading vessels. (Alternatively, they'll embark on the sort of pub-crawl that happens after the pubs are shut and involves loading as much booze as they can into wheelbarrows and making off with it.)

As such, the drinks menu at the Last Leg is unpredictable at best: one night they might serve discount aelfir honeywine out of pewter mugs; the next, suspiciously murky beer stolen from a shipwreck three leagues up-river; the night after, nothing to drink, but instead a vast quantity of moody glimmer they half-inched off a luckless Azurite looking to expand into black market pharmaceuticals.

THE WIZENED WEASEL

Say what you like about Knights – they'll kill you when you're standing up, and awake, and odds they'll at least give you a fighting chance to arm yourself. Not so with the order of the Wizened Weasel.

Seeing themselves as a cut above the other orders, the Weasels enjoy the finer things in life: wine, haute cuisine, classical music, other people's property, and the sort of murders that don't leave blood on their doublets. Where the other orders have loosely-enforced codes of conduct that limit blood-shed to street brawls and disputes over territory, the Weasels make a habit of stealing from, selling to and killing whomever they please. There is no taboo they will not break in search of profit and luxury; they are hedonists without compare, combined with an iron will to get their hands on their hearts' desires – and they are very good at what they do thanks to a screening and initiation process for members that rivals the Ministry's. Each member of the Weasels has their own particular vice, and many build shrines to it in their quarters; lust is to be controlled, and celebrated, and treated with the utmost respect.

Squirrelled away in a narrow tower that juts out of the main body of Spire itself, the Wizened Weasel Inn caters to a discerning clientele – it is not unusual to see an aelfir entering the doors to partake of the tavern's trademark roast goshawk and apricot, or for the Duke herself to pay a visit to meet with the Weasels.

Those wanting to gain access without membership should come dressed appropriately, and with a coinpurse commensurate to the extortionate markup the Weasels place on everything they sell. At the door, they'll be met by Lorens, a haughty, if small, drow who is one of the most feared bouncers on the North Docks – where most doormen would pitch you into the waters of the river for misbehaving, Lorens will reward even minor infractions of etiquette with the utter destruction of your reputation.

THE SKY DOCKS

Perched near the top of the city, the Sky Docks is a hub of commerce for the upper half of Spire. Masked aelfir dignitaries and their staff flock to exclusive boutiques offering luxuries from faraway lands, food from the Garden district is sold from carts in the centre marketplace, and illegal goods from Red Row – synthetic glimmer, concentrated malak, counterfeit documentation and overpowered, unstable pistols – flood through the black market, headed for the pleasure palaces of Amaranth and the Silver Quarter.

In dark temples, foreign traders pray to foreign gods: Ur'leth, the Star-Child; Ovass, the Wise Perching-Bird; The Earth-Soul, a gnoll fertility god; and Plür, a giant slumbering god-toad which squats in the oasis at the centre of the desert city of Plür. From great shelf-like staging posts, flocks of giant birds carrying messengers and delivery-boys flap back and forth, arcing down the length of the city and up to the singing skywhales that bear strange goods from distant lands, the entire place a fluttering web of trade.

MEGACORVIDAE

The genus megacorvidae refers to any number of types of creatures, all of which display raven- or crow-like traits but are a little larger than an adult drow. These great birds form the majority of the exterior transport system of Spire, carrying goods, supplies and occasionally people up and down the outside of the city. They can't fly upwards for very long with a load – they're not especially strong – and so it's significantly cheaper to go down or across than it is to go up.

Breeding and husbandry of megacorvidae seems outside of the ken of aelfir, who animals tend to distrust (and few of whom have the patience to bond with something that will die within a decade). Drow, and in particular those with connections to House Aliquam, maintain the majority of the rookeries and endure their position close to the sun's light with traditional Crowsmen's garb – multiple layers of dark cloth, sometimes cut to look like feathers, and a broad-rimmed pointed hat. Crowsmen are a dour and superstitious lot, swearing fealty to a dark monarchy of corvid fae-gods, and no-one outside the sect really likes spending time with them.

Most megacorvids lack the intelligence of their smaller brethren, losing something of the cunning through years of selective breeding (and administration of sacred tonics), though albino corvids of all types – both mega- and regular-sized – are very clever, with some fine specimens able to hold a simple conversation or play, but not win, games of cards.

SKYWHALES

Roughly once a day or so, a skywhale will sail near the docks, and flocks of birds will fly up and collect goods from them; the council have decreed that, following a disastrous accident where a flaming skywhale smashed into the city twenty years ago, none of the beasts may approach within a half mile of Spire.

The skywhale is a strange beast indeed – a huge, bloated creature the size of a large house, with a small head perched at the base of a swollen sac of stinking gas that keeps it floating high in the air. To feed, it has upwards of twenty long, trunk-like arms that caress the countryside beneath it as it floats; these arms are stronger than they would appear, and pluck great handfuls of leaves from trees (or the tree itself) upwards to the mouth, depositing it inside before returning gracefully to the ground. It mostly eats plant matter, but it realises the nutritional value of meat and is not above devouring a slumbering, injured or otherwise immobile creature.

THE CORVID COURT, A FAE MONARCHY

The great and ancient monarchy known as the Corvid Court lives in the branches of every tree and the echo of every raven's caw; they are brief, and fleeting, and cruel, and absolute. Creatures of staggering beauty and raw, unfettered hideousness, their forms shift and change like dappled sunlight, or the iridescence of a bird's wing.

Queen Erebiah grants speed to those who push rose-thorns into their thumbs; Duke Vexantion collects coins and shiny things, and will trade magical gewgaws for particularly beautiful eyes; Prince Gallstack is a glutton, pure and simple, and will provide shelter in his otherworldly lands in exchange for a fat pig and good conversation; Baroness Werrian-Sax has travelled far beyond our world and the fae world that sits beside it – to the gold and ivory Palace-realm of the Immortal Qu, the winding wet labyrinths of the World-Eater Wyrm, the dimension where cats go when no-one's watching – and she will speak of them, for a fee.

But the Corvid Court punishes far more than it rewards, and the lives of their worshipers – the Crowsmen, who breed and tend to the giant corvids that sustain Spire – are riddled with strange actions and beliefs that they swear will lend them a long life and help avoid disaster. A Crowsman will never say "good-bye," and get angry if they hear it, for to them this is akin to a killing curse; some refuse to light a fire where no light already shines, for fear of angering the darkness; some believe that it is bad luck to start or finish a bottle of spirits; and all of them let the first match in a pack burn all the way down to their fingers, giving the fey prince Little Lord Maryn his due so the rest of the pack will be blessed, and each match will keep its flame, even in the wind.

Skywhales are placid, docile creatures that prefer to avoid conflict, and have very few natural predators – they can simply hover upwards to avoid any land-based animals, and only the largest of the megacorvids would stand a chance of injuring the creature's thick, rubbery hide. Any creature attempting to attack it risks reprisal from those whipping, dexterous limbs, and if it is too big to stuff into their mouth, the

skywhale will smash the offending creature into the ground and float on its way.

For centuries, elves of all creeds (but especially the wind-elves, who dwell in the clouds that cluster around mountains) have ridden the skywhales, using them for trade and, on occasion, warfare – although they are very slow, and prone to ignoring orders, so military applications are limited. The aelfir, unable to learn the knack of persuading the whales where to go, have equipped them with sails made of stitched-together leaves and walrus-skin, but steering one is not as simple a procedure as guiding a ship through the ocean.

The skywhales sing when they are happy, or sad – they expel thick, moist gas from their sac through a series of fluted apertures along the lengths of their great bodies, and emit a repetitive, keening song in time with their great, slow heartbeats. The deranged Composer-General Hair-Smouldering-On-Pyre's masterpiece, viewed as one of the highest works of aelfir art, requires a skywhale to sing the lead role. It has never been successfully performed.

AIRLARKS

Nets hang under the exterior of the dock in an attempt to catch people or things that fall through, but they are of cheap make and in disrepair, and it would be a fool indeed who trusted their life to the Sky Dock nets.

Nestled in the nooks and crannies of the net flit airlarks – people, mostly drow and the occasional young human, who command small armies of birds from the backs of strong, if simple, racing megacorvids. (Every airlark has dreams of becoming a megacorvid racer, but none have the resources to make it big on the circuit.) These avian gangs flit back and forth beneath the net, plucking things that fall from mid-air or quickly tugging them to safety if they get caught in the nets.

There's not a great deal of profit in it, but a common airlark scam is to get an accomplice to shove someone off the edge of the docks and then "rescue" them, taking whatever reward the doubtlessly gracious unfortunate has to give (and if they don't offer a reward, most 'larks will toss them tumbling down the city as a warning to others). A "'lark's favour" is a common term in and around the docks for a gift or service performed on your behalf that ends up doing you more harm than good.

BALLISTAE

Remnants of a sky-war that never happened, the ballistae that dot the outer rim of the sky docks are badly-maintained and poorly-guarded. Few of the guards that patrol here would even know where the ballista ammunition is kept (almost all of it has been sold off for its metal tips) and almost none of them are trained in the operation of such deadly siege weaponry.

Still, they remain, mainly to dissuade any pirate-steered skywhales from robbing the docks; while ancient and rusty, even a glancing blow from one could rupture a skywhale's skin and send the whole thing, crew and all, crashing to the ground far below.

They are backed up by a wide array of cannon with grapeshot canisters ready to load, which are more commonly used against rogue bands of megacorvid riders. One member of each guard squad is entrusted with the maintenance and operation of a shotgun so they can unleash a storm of pellets into the air and down any lightly-armoured invaders.

THE INSTRUMENTALISTS

Some fringe scientists believe that Spire is a great part-finished musical instrument, played by the winds themselves, and that its songs lend great insight to the ways of the world, dimensions other than their own, and the secret paths of the future. These groups – of which there are seventeen different factions, all embroiled in a nightmare web of betrayals and counter-alliances – are known collectively as Instrumentalists.

Some, the Chords, prefer to spend their time listening to the sound the wind makes as it passes over the building, extrapolating omens from the whistling breeze; others, the Post-Zephyrites, craft sculptures that hum and chime throughout the night; others still, the Children of Spire, seek out old schematics and artwork of the city and try to restore it to how it was "originally," and kill anyone who disagrees with them by hanging them off the side of the docks to die from exposure, starvation and the attentions of megacorvids.

Whether or not Spire is an instrument at all is a matter of some debate, but these cults seem able to predict the future by listening to the whistling wind, or to "sing" to the city using eerie arcanomechanical voice modulators that unlock doors, reposition tunnels, and heal structural damage – so they might be on to something.

THE BLUE PORT

A sea of flashing blue cloth awaits the traveller on foot, or beast of burden, who arrives in Spire. In the south port, also known as The Blue Port, the merchants and traders dress in blue scarves and robes, and dye their stall awnings the colour of the midsummer sky. Even drow, who normally eschew bright colours, are wrapped head-to-toe in different shades of blue – from aquamarine to teal to sapphire to navy. It's seen as a mark of pride to have the brightest, or the most unique, shade, and even the lowliest beggar will carry a scrap of indigo rag for luck.

THE CUSTOMS HOUSE

The Blue Port has the tightest restrictions on entry anywhere in Spire, as the council attempts to stem (or at least control) the flow of illegal goods into the city. After passing a cursory check at the main gate (which has not been closed since the aelfir ordered it thrown open at the end of the war against the drow), travellers with saleable amounts of produce are directed through one of six paths that lead into the city itself. At the gateway to these paths, customs officers examine their wares and, depending on where they're going, what they're selling, and how greedy or vindictive the customs officer is feeling that day, they'll be charged a handful of sten or a portion of their goods in exchange for the right to sell them in the city.

The gates that lead into the city are, from west to east: Leadbetter, Hexaton, Jennisgate, Gryphon, Moongate and Candlegate.

The customs house is, as one would imagine, staggeringly corrupt. The current overseer, an ex-career city guard drow who received the post as a promotion in exchange for destroying evidence on a number of high-profile murder cases, has sworn to wring everything she can out of the post and retire fat and happy.

THE BAZAAR

Outside the structure of the Spire itself but within the protective walls of the city, traders ply their wares in a huge, maze-like market called the Bazaar, or the Blue Bazaar. Folk from all over the known world come to buy and sell goods, and most anything can be found here – in the open if it's legal, and hidden deep in the warren of stalls if not.

It's said that it's possible to walk from one side of the bazaar to the other without ever seeing the sky, if you know which routes to take. Guides – ranging from professional organisations like the Guild of Middlemen and the Compasses, to scrappy collections of have-a-go urchins – make a living from guiding people where they need to go and staying up to date on the latest information: who's selling what, who's buying what, how to cut through dangerous parts of the market, or how to lead people down the right alleys that'll get them rolled for their coin-purses in exchange for a cut.

THE LOW WALL BOARDING HOUSE

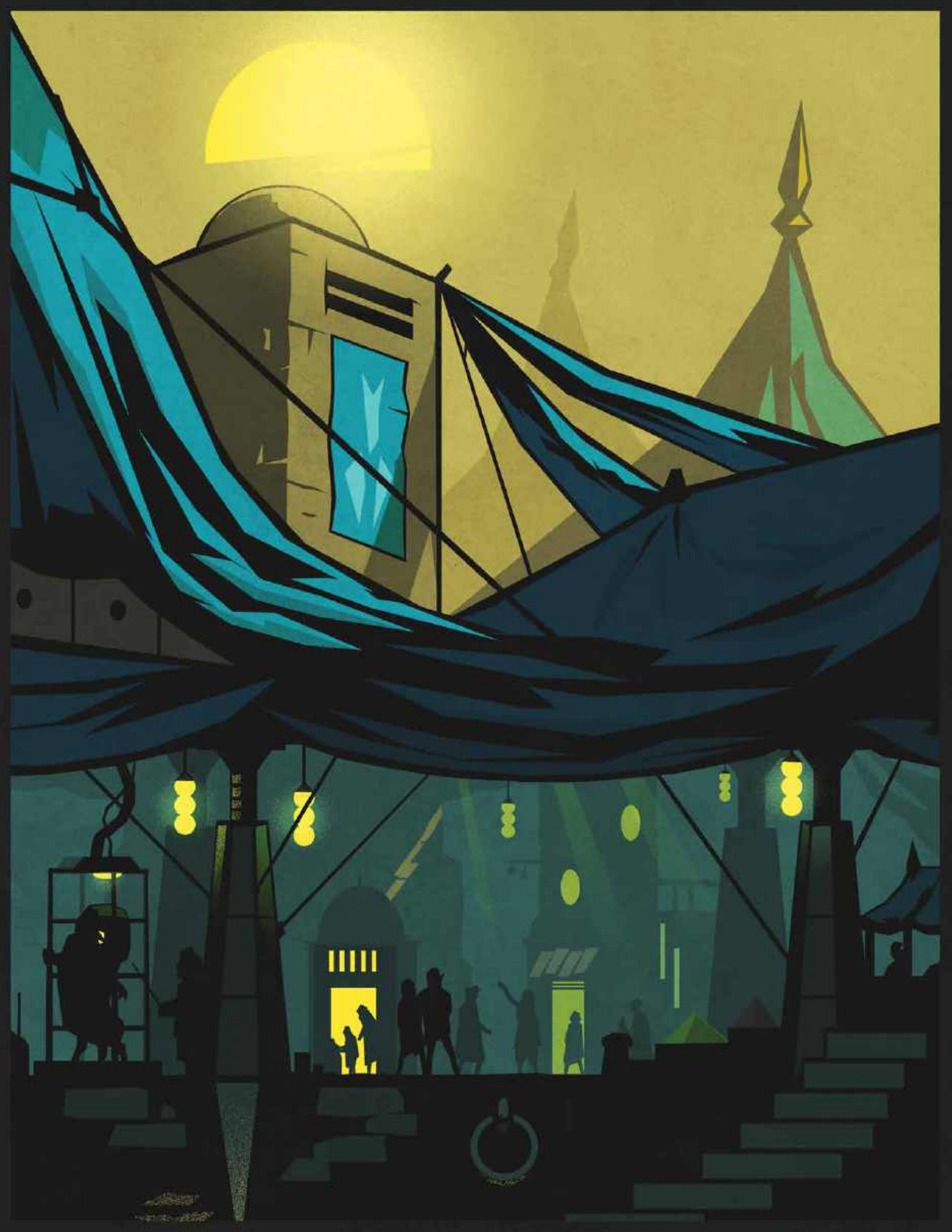
Built into the structure of the city wall itself, The Low Wall is multi-storey inn and cafe that welcomes all kinds of traveller. Here, drow sit in shaded gardens and sip strong Nujabian kafee with human traders from far beyond the coast, and swap stories and news from the outside world.

The lower five floors house a variety of rooms, storage facilities and dormitories of varying price and quality, and the upper levels – to which travellers cannot get access without express permission of Devin, the ancient and cunning drow that runs the place – are some of the most stable and reliable smuggling routes into Spire, burrowing through the main structure with tiny, torchlit passages that terminate in a variety of low- and mid-Spire alleys and basements. Odds are that if you see an inn within the walls of Spire called The Low Wall, or something similar, it's part of the huge network of tunnels that makes up what is (on paper) the largest bar for miles around.

MERCENARY HOUSES

Given the lawlessness of the lands around Spire, and the lingering gangs of demobbed soldiers and bandits that prey on travellers outside of the city walls, it's considered a wise idea to hire a mercenary fighter or five to accompany a caravan on long journeys. The council keeps a number of accounts active with the understanding that mercenaries on retainer will patrol the Blue Port and keep trouble to a minimum while working in conjunction with the customs house to limit smuggling and illegal immigration.

As such, policing in the Bazaar largely depends which mercenary house is active at the time, and how well they've been paid. Surrounding the verdigris- and moss-covered fountain of St Benefferas, the Guild of Free Swords keep the peace – and given their pride in their work, they keep it efficiently and with an iron fist. Near Candlegate, a loose collection of drow ex-special forces known as Greywall are in charge of enforcing customs



regulations, and are famously bribable and notoriously cruel.

The Blues, the Reformed Jaegers, the Storm Horses, the Gravediggers, the Ravens; each of these notable houses maintains a presence in or around the Blue Bazaar in some of the only bricks-and-mortar buildings that can be found there. Anyone in need of some short-term friends with a penchant for efficient violence should look no further.

MERCENARIES

Names: Steryn, Bastillo, Xenomos
Descriptors: A face covered in scars and bristly dark hair, Recently-bandaged wounds, Covered in gaudy jewellery
Difficulty: 0 on patrol, 1 if they're riled up and out for blood
Resistance: 6
Equipment: Half-decent chainmail and leather (Armour 3), jackdaw pistols (D6, Piercing, Ranged, Reload) and well-maintained swords (D6)

THE AELFIR DISTRICT

Walled off from the rest of the district, the aelfir district (known as Uptown or Elftown to the traders in the bazaar) is a quiet, dead place compared to the mad bustle of the markets. When wealthy aelfir descend from their homes atop Spire to travel by land, they do so via this heavily-guarded district. Golden railings stud the grey-white streets, and pavements are often covered with red or purple carpets for the elves to walk on barefoot after they descend from the Spiretop in a palanquin borne by a flock of muzzled megacorvids. Trees – strange and bound things that are wire-wrapped from birth to grow in unnatural patterns – line the centre of the avenues, and masked staff members can occasionally be seen scurrying down sidestreets and back alleys to serve their masters.

As the district is considered home to the aelfir, mask-wearing is enforced, and to be seen with your face uncovered is disgusting – tantamount to defecating on the floor of a human's house. Those who have business here, such as delivering expensive imported food to one of the sumptuous round-houses or carrying screeds of love poetry from one besotted aelfir to another, must wear a mask displaying their allegiance and purpose, and navigate multiple patrols of black-helmed guards carrying tall, deadly elven greatbows.

Whenever a noble descends from the Spiretop, the people of the marketplace gather to watch them in their finery and coo at their legions of retainers. The aelfir, eager to be seen, have made sure that their approach into the port is viewable from a variety of locations – all guarded, of course.

Although lacking many of the comforts of up-Spire, much of the aelfir district is similar to their home district of Amaranth on page 107.

THE AZURITES

The Azurites have devoted their lives to buying and selling. Clad in their trademark blue robes (and adorned with blue scarves, hats, buckles, flowers and jewelry) they make a habit of buying low and selling high, maintaining an awareness of the markets, and knowing precisely who to sell what to. Given their exposure to a wide variety of other cultures, they all possess a brief understanding of many local languages and dialects – and often have no problem picking up new information or adapting what they know to fit.

As such, Azurites are in high demand from the Ministry, who are always in need of agents who can cut a deal in any language, persuade assets to perform unsavoury actions, and lie through their teeth to get what they want.

DISTRICTS AND FACTIONS OF CRIME

RED ROW

A bustling, smoky, fire-lit knot of activity, Red Row attracts the best and worst the undercity has to offer. Demon-summoning gnolls rub shoulders with powder-cheeked drow nobles, filthy gutterkin wait tables, and retroengineers ply their dangerous wares on every street corner. Law and order are strange, half-remembered concepts to many of the inhabitants, and while the Guard maintain a token presence down here, much of the day-to-day enforcement is carried out by gangs of armed humans and drow working for one of the three bosses who run the joint.

Those bosses are Mother Moon, The Sisters, and Mr Winter, and sooner or later everyone in Red Row works for them (whether they know it or not). Those under the impression that they can operate independently are quickly brought into their ranks or destroyed – headquarters burnt to the ground, employees dragged into the fighting pits, childen nailed to doors, and so on.

Still: it's a hell of a night out, if you're tough enough to survive it.

PEOPLE IN ARENA

Here are some of the people you might find in Arena on any given night:

- Miasmari, a drow gladiatrix jacked up on illegal sliver biotechnology, impossibly strong, losing it, needs help
- Proud-Shimmering-Beast-of-the-Dawn, an aelfir pretty-boy brawler who is irritatingly good at fighting and managing several drug habits
- Masque, a cloaked and masked fighter wrapped up in mystery who is in fact several people all wearing the same costume at different times
- Mataj Wall-the-Ice, a smiling aelfir tourist on a walking holiday of lower Spire who is all too happy to part with his vast sums of money in exchange for a taste of under-spire excitement, and will try to lose his heavily-armoured escort at the earliest opportunity in search of fun. He is currently being taken for a ride by upwards of five interested parties, all of whom are stopping people from killing and/or robbing their cash cow

ARENA

Built in a giant step-well, Arena is the undercity's most popular entertainment destination and murder-pit. Great smoking braziers that never go out – jealously tended by two rival gangs of rafter-dwelling gutterkin – light the vast space, and the refugee gnolls who run the show put on nightly brawls for a baying crowd of hundreds, if not thousands, of attendees. Public fights are usually fought to first blood or first kill, with gladiators commonly betting on themselves in a Kill match to get out of some horrendous debt.

While most of the gnolls hiding out in Spire resent the propaganda spread around by the high elves, the gnolls who oversee Arena through a web of human and drow enforcers prefer to skew as closely to the rumours as possible: it's better for business. Their leader, a towering, demon-scarred elder known as Mother Moon, is a learned sorcerer and academic, but she carries herself with the air of an alpha predator and makes sure none of her underlings are aware of her secret libraries of aelfir poetry.

MOTHER MOON'S HAREM MEMBER

Names: Dancing-Gil, Happy Lorenzo, Altruim
Descriptors: With a coil of razorwire wrapped around a gauntlet, Dressed in fine silks, Bearing a sutured-on mask
Difficulty: 2 if they've got the crowd on their side, otherwise 0
Resistance: 7, and each time they take down an opponent, refresh D3
Equipment: Beautiful, flashy weapons on chains or ribbons (D6, Surprising), low-cut trousers, glitter

BROTHER HELLION'S CHURCH OF THE GUN

From a flyer, distributed widely to those who walk through Red Row:

"Come one, come all, to Brother Hellion's Church of the Gun on Kiln Street! Bathe in the glittering majesty of humanity's greatest gift from the gods – the firearm!

"Captured fire, awaiting ignition in gunpowder! The holy rotation of chamber and barrel! The blessed incense of gunsmoke! A bold and righteous power in the palm of one's hand, greater than could one ever imagine! Mighty lines of cannon, roaring their defiance at the world, stamping man's dominion over the unholy beasts of creation!

"Each year, the sacred work of the retroengineers in Gywnn-Enforr university uncovers more and more secrets hidden within the workings of these perfect, ancient machines. Come worship, believer, and have your sacred tools blessed by Brother Hellion – Brother Hellion who saw the face of Eternity in a shell-casing, Brother Hellion who heard the secret and percussive tongue of the gods in the crack-bang of flintlocks, Brother Hellion whose very breath is gunsmoke and whose tongue is barrel-hot with the fires of creation!"

It remains unclear whether Brother Hellion is a genuine worshiper of a yet-undefined deity or an elaborate con-artist with something up his sleeve, but he is amassing a congregation of the angry and powerless, given means to change the world through guns. He can frequently be seen walking the length of Kiln Street wreathed in spireblack smoke, carrying his two sacred revolvers and flanked by a trio of shotgun-toting daughters in heavy armour, preaching his gospel to a crowd of rag-tag gun owners and handing out food, and bullets, to the poor. No-one's tried to step in on his turf yet, but heaven help them when they do.

For more information on advances granted by joining the gunpowder congregation, see page 72.

FOLLOWERS OF THE GUN

Names: Brother Cordite, Sister Pin, Initiate Chambers
Descriptors: Has mad sunken eyes, Whispers to their revolver between shots, Replaced teeth with shell-casings
Difficulty: Most of these cultists are in need of a good night's sleep and a hot meal. 0
Resistance: 4, 6 if you threaten Brother Hellion himself
Equipment: Beautifully maintained pistol or rifle, (D8, Ranged) but (D6, Ranged, Reload) or (D6, Ranged, Unreliable) in anyone else's hands. Gun will have a name

VORLOREN STANDARD

The last outpost of up-Spire control in the undercity and the furthest reach of the law, this ramshackle fortress – standing alone, distant from the bustle of Red Row – is a popular destination for officers who get ideas above their station, upset the wrong people, or who simply can't buckle down and get the job done.

Manned by a skeleton staff of no more than twenty guards at any one time, Vorloren Standard (so called because it is built within the old premises of Vorloren Standard Warehouses and Shipping, and no-one has repainted the sign) is home to drunks,

losers, mad-eyed vigilantes and the occasional naive sergeant with delusions of a safe undercity.

At present, the guards are at an uneasy peace with the crime lords that run Red Row, and are little more than another set of armed enforcers for their operations. They crack down on minor infractions, clean up the less efficient gangsters, and try to stop the district from falling into absolute chaos by breaking up fights and keeping the number of retroengineered guns on the streets to an acceptable minimum. At present, an all-out war between the overworked law-keepers of Vorloren Standard and Brother Hellion's zealous armed congregation is all but inevitable.

VORLOREN STANDARD GUARD

Names: Lucas Stissy, Harry Lefren, Michelle Debwah
Descriptors: Visibly shaking, Up-gunned and wild-eyed, Smiling creepily
Difficulty: 0, 1 if you take them on in their HQ
Resistance: 5
Equipment: Vorloren Standard Armour (3), Not-technically-legal sword (D6), Red Row revolver (D6, Ranged, Dangerous)

L'ENFER NOIR

Catering to a more discerning crowd than the bloody dirt of Arena, L'Enfer Noir is a multi-level den of extravagant sin and iniquity the likes of which would make the average Spire citizen spit out their drink, and the average aelfir sit up and take notice.

The club is operated by The Gentlemen, who are from Elsewhere and speak in tight, precise voices with ticks and whirrs like music boxes – and staffed by a cadre of surgically beautified and homogenised androgyne staff. The building encompasses multiple bars, a variety of bordellos (offering everything from vanilla escapades for the average attendee right down to the strangest delights available in the trade – dancing toadgirls with questing tongues; bestial gnoll doxies and stenboys with glistening fur reeking of pungent pheromones and sweat; a young man whose eyes shine with the flames of angels at the moment of climax – and more besides), several dancefloors with live music and not one but two grand stages, often running directly competing shows with a lavish reward for the highest number of attendees.

L'ENFER NOIR STAFF MEMBER

Names: Persistence, Temperance, Charity
Descriptors: Eerily identical androgyne beauty marked out only by glyph tattoos behind their ears
Difficulty: 0
Resistance: 6
Equipment: Elegant, fashionable clothes, subdermal armour (factored into resistance), retractable bonespur fingertips (D3, D6 when they're at resistance 3 or lower)

THREADNEEDLE SQUARE

At the north end of Threadneedle Square, past the rows and rows of desperate burnouts hustling travellers for change, past the cramped and noxious workshops, past the watchful guard of mask-clad enforcers, atop the dilapidated warehouse that creaks and crumbles, The Sisters rule. They enjoy the finer things in life – silks, chocolate from the East, fine fruits, wine and brandy, cigarillos from Far Nujab, pleasure-boys from the Home Nations, draughts of corpse apple liqueur – and they will have them by any means necessary. Their quarters drip with imported, slightly off-colour luxury – the tapestries faded and patched, the wine bitter, the tobacco dry and harsh.

The Sisters are, from youngest to oldest: the gangly and sleepless genius chemical engineer Harriet, jacked up on her own supply; the grim accountant Victoria, who manages the day-to-day running of the business; and the glamorous Elizabeth, currently on her eighth husband, looking to found an empire and stop her legion of children from killing each other.

They don't deal the drugs themselves – except when it comes to especially large up-Spire shipments, which are conducted over tea and barbiturates in their rooftop "garden," a gaudily decorated ballroom-slash-meeting hall – and leave the majority of the work to legions of well-paid dealers, leg-breakers and middlemen.

THE GUTTERKIN

"Gutterkin" is a term for any small, greasy genetic throwback that makes its way to Spire, and the race – if such a term is appropriate – is only tolerated in the undercity. Needle-toothed rat-boys, patchy-feathered gullmen, stinking trash elementals, filthy goblins, slimy gremlins, psoriasis-pocked toadgirls, drow abortlings – they gather and fester in gaps between

DRUGS IN SPIRE

Drugs remain a perennially popular leisure activity, especially in the lightless, hopeless depths of a city such as Spire. Here is a selection of drugs (both naturally-occurring and manmade) that characters could find on a street corner, organised in order of most to least common. Real-world drugs such as coffee, tea, alcohol and tobacco are fairly common, if not especially affordable for most of the populace.

Many rare or expensive drugs are illegal, and guards will generally confiscate them and imprison the bearer. Most controversially, the council agreed to outlaw the manufacture and distribution of malak seventeen years ago – although it is relatively harmless, its prevalence amongst drow gave them an excuse to arrest or bind into service almost any drow who'd reached adolescence.

Devilsroot, or Root: A naturally-growing tuber that can be chewed to release a stimulant, but has a bitter taste so is more commonly brewed as a tea and sweetened with sugar. Chewing root stains the teeth and is viewed as unfashionable by many younger drow.

Chum: A black-red glistening liquid made from fish eggs and guts using old drow techniques that has a similar effect to strong alcohol. It smells even worse than you imagine, and provides a dirty, messy high that's all-too-common on the streets of Derelictus that border on the Heart.

Maiden's Prayer: Abortifacient made from bundles of leaves that are steeped in water which is boiled and re-boiled to increase the intensity of the mixture. Given that drow don't carry their young until birth, maiden's prayer is almost exclusively purchased by humans.

Mushrooms: The drow grow a wide variety of fungi in the Garden district, and some of them are hallucinogenic. Nothing as potent or reliable as the manufactured drugs coming out of Threadneedle Square, of course, but a wide variety of mystic cults rely on strange-tasting tea brewed out of psychoactive mushrooms to spice up their gatherings.

Dagger: A lucky-dip of drugs, veering towards grimy stimulants, sold throughout Red Row. A pouch of dagger – it's sold as a brownish, crystalline dust – could contain upwards of forty individual chemicals, depending on how many hands it has passed through before it ends up travelling up someone's nose. Users commonly get into a lot of fights, and have a hugely over-inflated belief in their own combat abilities when they do.

Godsmoke: Fungus that grows around churches and holy sites is harvested and dried to make this reeking dust that is smoked rolled into cigarettes or packed into the bowl of a pipe. It offers euphoric and pain-dulling effects, making it popular with workers in the Gardens and the Works due to the number of injuries sustained as part of their jobs.

Malak: Mild depressant produced from blending two different kinds of algae; rendered down into a tincture and applied to the tongue or dropped into a drink. Most drow in the Home Nations take malak every day, but the criminality of the substance under aelfir rule has pushed manufacture and distribution underground. Because it's relatively easy to make, it remains pretty cheap.

Glimmer: Prismatic crystals which grow in the recesses of shrines to Demos, a goddess from a distant kingdom that was buried beneath desert sands long ago. Instils a blistering euphoria in users and an urge to dance and sing, which explains the colourful displays in the streets around the temples of Demos in Pilgrim's Walk.

Carotid: Hallucinogen that grows in the manner of spireblack in deep, dark parts of the city. Users report being able to see which parts of the city are "alive" – breathing, shivering rockskin and metal-bones that make up the internal structure of the city. Not in high demand, but a few artists took it a decade ago and painted elaborate reproductions of what they saw, pushing it to brief popularity. Some scholars believe it is not a hallucinogen at all, and instead syncs the soul of the user with that of the city so it can be seen as it truly is.

Corpsefruit: A drow delicacy that grows only in the tainted, blackened soils of the Home Nations, sold in Hemlock Fruit Market in Derelictus. Brings hypnotic visions of the dead when eaten.

Ambrosia: A manmade chemical from the laboratories of Threadneedle; intense, overwhelming hallucinogen that offers revelations and epiphanies to the user. In heavy demand from both high-ranking members of the Solar Cathedral and any number of unhinged down-Spire zealots.

Blues: Small pills which make the user feel impossibly sad. Primarily an aelfir drug, as many of them are unable to naturally feel sad, and they would like to experience it out of curiosity. "Mourning" parties are fairly common among young high elves, with participants dressing up in black lace, spending inordinate amounts of money on elaborate death masks, and crying together in a dimly-lit room while sombre music plays.

Sulphur: Pitch-black runoff from demonic incursions, rendered down into crystals that are smoked in glass pipes. Produces a monumental rush and skews the morality of the user, so that performing unpleasant or cruel acts feels better and better the more you take. Usually tremendously expensive, the appearance of cheap sulphur is a sign of in-Spire demon-summoning – which is terrible news for everyone.

Ivory: Potent hypnotic harvested from the venomous tusks of vicious narwhal-like amphibians that live far to the north. Very pleasant high, and appropriately expensive. Mister Alas, drow crime lord and owner of one-third of (appropriately) the Ivory Quarter, makes a habit of never taking anything else if he can help it.

The Dose: Retroengineered from schematics unearthed from the blighted Archology of Saltash, only a thousand or so of these crystalline pills exist within Spire. Human scientists believe that forerunners who came before the young races of the world perfected the medication to remove the need for sleep – one pill would rearrange their brains into a different configuration where it was simply no longer required. The human version available today works, but only for a week or so, at which point the effect of the lost sleep starts to catch up with the user – unless they take another pill. Every serious user of the drug in Spire – there are around five or six – would die from withdrawal symptoms if they missed a dose.

the walls and under floors, stealing small items and ganging up on lone, weak targets for food and money.

Official city stance on gutterkin – or Aberrants, as they're known in official documentation – is to exterminate them on sight. In practice, it's rarely worth the bother, and gutterkin are a common sight among the poorest inhabitants of Spire.

GUTTERKIN

Names: Pieces, Rock, Junker
Descriptors: A mangy-looking dogboy, A kobold with one arm, A blind and scarred aelfir
Difficulty: 0
Resistance: 3
Equipment: Rusty knives, stolen hammers, rubble in socks (D3, Unreliable)

KOWZ-UDDER

Long ago, the Red Row Vermissian station known as Shudder collapsed in on itself – it was badly constructed from inferior materials, as was most of the cursed network – and the building was abandoned to the lawless throng of settlers that populated the undercity. The sign outside, damaged in the collapse, lost the first two letters. Then: Kowz arrived.

Kowz is a hulking, broad-shouldered aelfir who proudly refuses to get involved in politics, high society or wearing much in the way of clothes – he follows the traditional ways of an ancient aelfir sect who find the constant soirees and backstabbing of their moneyed cousins in Spire tiresome and distracting.

Theirs is a brutal, semi-druidic life of enforced exposure, survival of the fittest and frequent trials of strength and will – as such, he fits in well in the dangerous confines of Red Row. Exiled from his house in the upper Spire due to his beliefs, he spent the majority of his fortune to purchase the rights to the property from Mother Moon a decade ago, and has established a base of operations for his sect. Where the ancient tribes of his people would brave the desolate frozen wildernesses of the Northlands, he tackles the mind-warping horrors of the Vermissian.

The bar he fashioned on top of the Vermissian rent is more of a means of funding these expeditions than anything else – he wants for little, rarely eats, and spends much of his time in quiet contemplation of the nightmares he has seen and those he has yet to face. Drinks are cheap, accommodation is spare but clean (for Red Row) and the energies of the Vermissian bleed up and into the structure itself, leading to a regular audience of occultist wannabes and sages on their day off.

He offers sanctuary to those who wish to lead a similar life and cut away the luxuries of civilisation with exposure to impossible odds, and as such accepts a wide variety of staff – exiled aelfir like himself, refugee gnolls from the mountains to the South, and drow who have lost everything and wish to see how far they can push themselves.

To date, no-one has mentioned to Kowz what an udder actually is, in case he gets upset.

DISTRICTS AND FACTIONS OF HIGH SOCIETY

AMARANTH, FROZEN HOME OF THE HIGH ELVES

Amaranth is home to the aelfir, and it is as strange and beautiful as they. Great palaces of cold stone reach from the polished marble floor to the glittering, star-studded roof; lush vermillion carpets line the streets, and soft magelight auroras flicker through the air to provide illumination as snow falls from above; servants and messenger-birds flit back and forth through shadowed back alleys, flashing identification emblazoned on their bodies to gain access through ranks of black-armoured guards. Aelfir while away the hours creating art, perfecting their work of gold- and silver-smithing, and learning the secrets of the world from dusty tomes.

The high elves, creatures of cold lands far to the north, utilise miracles on an industrial scale to keep the entire district chilled a handful of degrees above freezing. While they do not feel the cold and make a habit of wearing as little as possible, drow and human staff who spend any length of time in the district quickly adopt a variety of heavy robes, scarves and gloves to retain body heat as best they can.

MASKS

Everyone in Amaranth wears a mask. To be seen in public with one's face uncovered is unthinkable – all elves, and aelfir in particular, have a keen (some might say too keen) sense of etiquette and to be so brazen as to show your face to others, your emotions writ large across your face for all to see, is despicably rude. The act of removing your mask in front of another aelfir in private – not a servant, mind, or a drow – is one of the most intimate a high elf can perform, and indeed many married couples will go their entire lives without seeing one another's faces. It is not required as part of the traditional notions of marriage, and many older aelfir view it as frivolous and immoral.

An addition to a wide variety of occasion-specific masks – dinner-masks, drinking-masks, wedding-masks, poetry-masks, hunting-masks, sorrow-masks, love-masks, masks to wear whilst looking into a mirror, masks to wear whilst sorting through other masks – each aelfir possesses a "true" mask, which is custom-made to their specifications when they come of age. No matter what mask they're wearing, they will display their true mask somewhere on their body – on a hip or a shoulder, most commonly – to ensure that everyone knows who they are. Subsidiary masks (such as those for feelings or events) are themselves beautiful works of art, and wealthy or fashionable high elves will take great pains to never be seen in the same mask twice.

Servants must wear masks too, of course, but it is rare that they are permitted to own a true mask unless they prove themselves to be of singular worth – instead, they bear masks with the sigil or name of their employers etched on it, along with a symbol that indicates their role in the household or organisation.

There is perhaps no end to the social requirements placed upon aelfir when it comes to mask-wearing, and there is no central guide to refer to – to write down systems of etiquette is fine, although to do so

without obscuring them in at least three levels of allegory is seen as rather gauche, but to purchase and read such a book would be social suicide as an aelfir can never be seen not to know precisely what they are doing at all times. Whether it is socially required to wear, say, a different mask for each course of a seven-course meal, or whether to do such a thing is the height of impropriety, is a matter of much whispered discussion at the meal itself. Most aelfir, quite unable to keep up with the constantly-shifting web of transgression and celebration, simply do whatever they want as hard as they can and hope that their natural panache will carry them through.

THE BLACK GUARD

The keeping of law and order in Amaranth is handled by a small cadre of elite guards recruited from other parts of the city, each clad in black armour and carrying either a halberd or a sword and pistol. They are dangerous, well-trained and surprisingly loyal – perhaps because their captain, Maji Eboh, is a reanimated undying drow who's held the post for seventy-five years, and folk say that the Council themselves hold the jar that contains the still-beating heart that's keeping her alive.

BLACK GUARD

Names: Hurrell, Wexen, Sarhan
Descriptors: Has a full-face mask, Carries a custom-made shotgun, Uses hand-signals
Difficulty: The Black Guard are elite warriors; tackling them head-on is a difficulty 2 action, but if you're sneaky about it it's difficulty 0
Resistance: 6
Equipment: Black Guard Armour (3), Halberd (D6, Brutal) and Jackdaw pistol (D6, Piercing, Reload). On occasion, one of the squad members will carry a Carog-pattern shotgun (D6, Point-blank, Reload) if they're expecting trouble

THE CRYSTAL TEMPLE

Standing proud above the district is a forever-frozen spike of crystalline ice and glass, positioned to best catch the sun's rays during the daylight hours. From this crystal pillar, the captured sunlight is filtered down through a series of ingenious lenses and mirrors of human make to distil and intensify it before it is stored in great steaming blocks of everfrost.

WEARING ANOTHER AELFIR'S MASK

For all their cruelty and capriciousness, aelfir tend not to wear one another's masks as part of a deception: to do so is a taboo of the highest order. This taboo has no hold over drow or humans, though, so if they are tall and slender enough to pass as a high elf, they'll take any opportunity to do so if it'll earn them something in the bargain (between seven and ten of the hundred richest aelfir in Amaranth are, in fact, humans or dark elves who have purchased or stolen a mask from a luckless high elf and are seeing how long they can keep up the ruse).

Everfrost, dug up from beneath the icy homeland of the high elves and imported at tremendous cost, is ice that cannot melt through normal means – it is said that only the apocalypse could melt it – but it can be carved and cut, and stored in special containers built of lead and gold. Time flows slow and strange inside the substance, and so the distilled sunlight dissipates out within each block like ink dropped into water.

It is from these batteries that the aelfir clerics of the sun church draw spiritual energy to power the miracles that keep Amaranth so cold, even in the hottest summer.

ICE CAVES

As cold as Amaranth is – it rarely creeps more than a few degrees above freezing – the ice caves are colder still. Here, aelfir – bright and vibrant creatures all – go to stop.

In hand-wrought caves of all shapes and sizes – from rented rooms no larger than a bathtub to grand, twinkling private caverns of ice and snow riddled with traps and entrances that only the owner can contort themselves through – the aelfir disrobe and submerge their bodies in water, cracking thin sheets of ice to do so, and may even remove their masks (for many aelfir, especially older ones, this is the one time they permit themselves this transgression).

Bathing in ice is seen as old-fashioned by many younger or more cosmopolitan aelfir, and some of them make a point of never doing it at all. Common wisdom is that ice-baths extend the already long lives of the high elves, slowing their heartbeats to a glacial pace and letting their blood flow slowly like the sap of the pine trees that line the mountains of their home.

It is noted (mainly by their staff after a couple of drinks) that aelfir who take regular ice-baths seem calmer and less cruel than those that do not, and while empathy is not a trait aelfir can possess, they seem more capable of understanding the emotions of others at a certain logical remove. Perhaps it is something to do with the weather – those aelfir outside of Amaranth, who have taken apartments in the Silver Quarter or choose to slum it in Red Row, are notoriously prone to fits of fury and sharp changes of mood, and rumour has it that any high elf who travels further south than Spire for any length of time goes strange.

Though it has been suppressed by the Council, it is well known that the distinguished and erudite aelfir diplomat Yennet Who-Stands-On-Beams-Of-Sunlight was sent to the front lines of the conflict in Far Nujab to broker a trade deal with the shadowed Duchy of Aliquam, and the heat drove her entirely deranged. Her appetites grew stranger and more twisted by the day, and even her wealth and the subservience of her staff could not contain her desires. She was finally put down by an abused courtesan who dashed her brains out with a poker when she let her guard down.

THE SPIRAL GARDENS

High elves do not understand natural beauty. They can appreciate a sunset, for example, or the body of a lover, or the colours of a flower's petals, but they are creatures of artifice and design. They feel that everything can be improved by an elf's hand: that sunset should be viewed through stained-glass windows; the lover's body can be decorated with fine inks and jewelry; the petals would look better plucked off the flower and frozen in ice.

(The aelfir's obsession with art, and belief their their art is superior to that created by the gods themselves, has lead to a cultural abandonment of landscape paintings. Almost every painting made by the hand of an aelfir is a self-portrait in some way, or includes the image of at least one other aelfir. To do otherwise would be a waste of paint.)

So aelfir gardens do not resemble gardens as most inhabitants of Spire would think of them; they are sterile, nearly-dead places, their plants twisted and bound to grow into strange patterns. There is nowhere to sit or spend time, for they are not social places for congregation – they are more akin to living galleries of tremendously expensive art. Should the plants that a noble chooses to display in their spiral garden not grow under the frigid conditions found in Amaranth, they will construct glass-houses and heat them through hidden fires to ensure that their flowers grow larger, more vibrant, and more beautiful than those of their rivals.

It is not uncommon to see a gnoll or two tending to a spiral garden – in spite of the ongoing war with their nation to the south. Gnolls possess a staggering affinity for agriculture and cultivation of unusual plants which has allowed them to survive, and indeed prosper, in the harsh desert of their home. The aelfir make exceptions to the laws against gnolls in the hive for those of special skill, and have gone to great lengths to ensure that they can snap up the services of a particularly adept gardener – including, but not limited to: murder, industrial espionage, border skirmishes, running for Council, and commissioning opera.

If you have a gnoll (and all the best aelfir do) then it's seen as good form to have them grow a plant which boasts an astonishing poison – the necrotising widowept, heliswort that brings swift oblivion, or maybe the writhing torment contained within the spiked leaves of the ennisroot – and cultivate the toxin to unnatural levels, perhaps grafting specialised moonsilver spurs to the thorns of the plant the way a human cock-fighter might attach steel spikes to the claws of their champion.

Then, once a day – or more, if they can afford it – the aelfir has a suitably large animal brought into the garden and introduced to the plant, at which point it dies and those watching applaud appreciatively. While most view quickness of death as the ultimate expression of poison's beauty, some avant-garde garden critics hold up pain, the more fierce and long-lasting the better, as the true mark of merit.

IVORY ROW

Once, perhaps a hundred years ago, Ivory Row was a bustling hive of society – the place to see and be seen. It was founded upon the efforts of three long-dead drow ivory magnates, funnelling twisted unicorn-horn and hard-won tygre-tusk to desperate buyers in the home nations. Row upon row of houses, each more expansive and beautiful than the last, stretched out to the district walls, and the streets at night were filled with the sound of soirees and parties running on until the early morning.

But Ivory Row fell out of fashion, and with the arrival of the aelfir the nobles of the city emigrated to

the gaudy and exciting Silver Quarter and, if permitted, the high-elf dominated Kingdom. Street by street the district fell into quiet and slow, gentle decay.

Now, Ivory Row is a shadow of its former self – those same huge mansions exist, still, but are crumbling and abandoned, all owned by a trio of decrepit and stubborn landlords each unwilling to give the other an ounce of control. Those few surviving who do live here, unable or unwilling to move out, are trapped in a forgotten era of faded glory.

THE SUNLIGHT COLLECTIVE

Ivory Row's strangest feature is a set of twenty-six shifting windows, their mechanisms unknown, that make slow and predictable arcs across the outer wall of Spire and cast great fingers of light down into the dusty streets below. Several cults, mainly made up of human retroengineers, have devoted their lives to studying the slow pilgrimages of these windows, seeing if they can replicate the technology elsewhere and, if not, at least if any sort of greater meaning can be derived from these strange miracles of forgotten science.

On the rooftops below the windows, though, the Sunlight Collective follows the pattern of the light through the district. A loose gang of bohemians, poets, artistes and occultists, the Collective believes that the sunlight – when filtered through the unique (and largely unbreakable, and possibly self-healing) glass of the windows above grants them inspiration from the gods themselves.

The membership of this group of vagabonds can be roughly split down the middle into monied poseurs attempting to fritter away their parents' fortunes on elaborate drugs and outlandish rooftop parties, and impoverished artists, models and creatives desperate to latch onto the movement to survive. (Almost every drow amongst the collective is an Idol, so called because a human or aelfir lordling in the group has decided that they are too beautiful to ignore and thus sponsors their presence.)

Joining one of these nomadic groups is seen as something of a rite of passage for artists, both up- and down-Spire, and anyone who's anyone in the last seven years has, at one point or another, run with the collective. Disgraced Warrior-Poet Petals-Cut-By-Razor spent six tumultuous months under the patronage of Prince Zion before launching her most critically-acclaimed work to date – We, The Ten Thousand, Stand Waiting Eyes Wet Before The Sunrise (which is both a controversial work of polyamorous high elven love poetry and an invasion plan for the gnoll city of Al'Arjhama) and subsequently fleeing to the undercity following a fatal dispute between her fifth and seventh wives.

THE HIDDEN

Given the vast sums of money involved in Ivory Row, the guard maintain a heavy presence here to ensure that undesirables are kept out, and the Sunlight Collective doesn't cause too many problems past the occasional late-night party or minor larceny. Their main duty is to guard the borders of the district to ensure that impoverished vagrants from Pilgrim's Walk or the Gardens down-Spire don't try to take homes in the vast, empty mansions.

But there are many entrances to the district, and not enough guards to watch them all, and desperate people manage to break through on occasion and hide away in the creaking darknesses inside the enormous, semi-abandoned structures. These people (known collectively as the Hidden) exist as parasites to the houses, hiding away in disused servants' quarters and making markets in attics, spending their lives in fear of discovery by an inquisitive guard or a keen-eyed member of the private security firms that occasionally hunt through the houses looking for layabouts.

The punishment for trespassing differs depending on the owner of the house – most commonly, criminals are roughed up and shoved out of the district, but in particularly severe cases (one security sweep found a family three generations old in the cellar of the Marble Sanctuary; another discovered that a long-shuttered art gallery was full of forgeries, the originals sold off to up-Spire collectors) perpetrators may be indentured to the landlord for an unspecified length of time or hanged by the neck until dead from the withered branches of the trees in the central square of the district.

THE THREE

The Ivory Quarter is owned by three landlords, each unwilling to cede an inch of territory, and would rather see the district crumble into ruin than have it taken over by one of the others.

The cruel Lady Theryn Thorns-on-Silk rules over the northern district, orchestrating functions and parties attended by nobles and artists as decrepit as the mansions that house them – many of them having undergone undying surgery long ago. Filled with strange music from at least a hundred years in the past and reeking of incense, these soirees can last days at a time, with guests leaving to eat and sleep and returning once rested, while traditional aelfir entertainments – opera, torture, torture opera – entertain

those that remain. She is famed for her kindness upon discovering the Hidden in her domain, asking only that their faces are covered with sutured-on masks, and they are then invited to serve in her household or face exile.

The wicked Mister Alas, his ebon face etched into a permanent rictus grin with strange drow surgeries, never sleeps. He has perfected the art of staying awake, and no longer needs to rest – but, according to his many servants, he spends hours of his time locked up in his extensive quarters, reading books in long-dead tongues aloud and cursing the gods for their crimes against him, real or imagined. Incredibly wise and unbelievably callous, Mister Alas is the power behind much of Red Row, having lent money to most of the owners and landlords in the district at some point in the past. He is responsible for the destruction of the guard stations surrounding it, and it is his political sway that sees the rancid undercity grow year on year, rotting away Spire from the inside.

Finally, the devout Archbishop Wynn oversees the remainder of the district. A devotion to the aelfir sun cult not often seen in humans coupled with a vast inheritance following his father's untimely death in the far-away island of Berith's Walk many years ago led him to quickly buy out the crumbling homes as the Ivory District was falling out of fashion. He is now an old man indeed, who refuses to extend his life with undying surgery, and spends his time touring the vast, empty mansions, carried in a litter by a throng of bodyguards, henchmen, advisors and priests. He is planning something monumental, and each day teams of builders and artisans are ushered into his territory, but so far the rumours of a megacathedral to Father Sunrise taking up the entirety of his land are just rumours.

THE SILVER QUARTER

People come to the Silver Quarter to see, and to be seen. A glittering web of interconnected streets and buildings, perpetually illuminated by ancient magelights covered in coloured filters, the Silver Quarter is the destination for the rich and famous within Spire, and from beyond, to spend their hard-earned or easily-inherited cash on parties, luxury goods, expensive apartments and unique pleasures.

Water is pumped up from the rivers of the north docks, purified, and spread throughout the district via a network of canals that are patrolled and fought over by several rival gangs of boatmen. The boatmen do their best to keep their brawls and skiff-bys out of the public eye, for fear of upsetting paying customers.

THE HOUSE

Mesyé Só, a small-statured and intense drow, runs the House, and the House runs Silver Quarter. A collection of shell companies, gambling dens, bankrollers and landlords, the House is part secret society and part organised crime syndicate, with Só firmly installed at the head after a series of brutal takeovers in his youth.

Mesyé Só is rich enough to not have to mess people around, and as such his payments are generous and his reprisals for betrayal are utterly, horrendously swift. He makes an especial habit of paying handsomely for dangerous, risky or stupid work to be carried out by contractors, preferring to protect his own staff by keeping them away from the front lines.

Perhaps, though, the most remarkable thing about Só is his staff – they are almost exclusively aelfir, many down-on-their-luck or exiled from their own society. His bodyguards are a cadre of ex-Skalds, wide-eyed razor-wielding battle poets, who were disgraced following a shameful retreat in the battle of Many-Rivers-Reaching; his personal secretary is the forsaken stepchild of General Sun-on-Stone, an impossibly intelligent woman who wears a series of vibrant satin headscarves; his messengers and aides are the scions of House Smoke-Within-The Frost, whose founder took off her mask at court seventeen years ago and thus doomed the family to a lifetime of shunning.

CLUBS

The Silver Quarter pays host to a hundred or more clubs devoted to giving people with too much time and money on their hands something to do, ranging from inoffensive bars on the edge of the district that charge a nominal "membership" fee for entry and require that diners wear a jacket, to multi-layered, heavily-guarded and hugely-exclusive clubs deep within it.

The Order of St Perdita runs absurdly-lavish charity balls and galas to direct money down-spire – and while the majority of the funds are in fact tied up in a complicated system of money laundering, some of it does indeed end up in the hands of the needy, paying for poorhouses in the shadows of Derelictus, clothing the huddled masses of the industrial districts, and to buy the forsaken guards in Verloren some fresh boots

and ammunition as they attempt to keep the peace in lawless Red Row. One of the most active members, a moneyed drow known as Teja, takes great pleasure in rubbing shoulders with the the poor – unshaven guard officers, swashbuckling Knights of the North Docks, wide-eyed Lajhan priests – and has been implicated in several badly covered-up romances with them, to boot. Many a ball has been held in the honour of these fine gentlemen, and Teja has taken to the order with excitement and enthusiasm.

The Boating Club, so called because it overlooks the circular, ever-flowing Eternal Canal in a glass-bottomed bridgehouse and not because they do much in the way of boating, is where the best and brightest (and richest) students from the universities and colleges within the city are invited to socialise and engage in long, drawn-out games of Orbit. Orbit, a recent invention, is a complex human game played on a board with interlocking cogs that can spin the lacquered wooden playing surface in strange and unexpected ways – and the Ministry, as well as intelligence agencies from the human nations, and some of the more pragmatic aelfir diplomats, have discovered that the skillsets for Orbit and espionage are largely one and the same, so recruitment into an agency is commonplace amongst those who prove themselves worthy of membership.

The Gilded Oyster, so called for their practice of eating the rare, gold-flecked prospector oyster harvested from the rivers to the north of Spire, have an internal membership structure more complicated and multi-layered than the average ancient secret society. The Unmasked provides a place for aelfir to remove their masks and show their true faces, putting the debauchery of Amaranth to shame, as visiting high elves engage in twisted sulphur benders and wine-fuelled brawls. And there are more, hidden everywhere, behind brass-plaqued doors and velvet curtains: the mischievous Rotters, the coiffured gentlefolk of the Zebra club, the cocktail-crafting Caraways, the flight-obsessed Feathers and the ostentatious duellists of the Pistoliers.

THRILLSEEKERS

For those who wish to taste excitement but don't have the fortitude or self-destructive impulses to risk their purses (and lives) on the thrills of Red Row, the Silver Quarter offers a set of conveniently accessible ways to broaden one's horizons – for the right price, of course.

Primarily, it offers the second-broadest array of available narcotics in Spire, second only to Threadneedle Square itself where the majority of those narcotics were made. The guard, keen to maintain a pleasant atmosphere on the streets of the district (but not overly upset troublemakers who may wish to come back and spend more of their fortunes at a later date), operate a set of "cells". These are handsomely appointed, furnished with ensuite provisions, and offer room service and therapeutic visits from healers and courtesans for the use of visitors who have let their passions get the better of them.

The Hearts, a cadre of devout and disheveled worshipers of the luck goddess Stolz, run the Mermaid (detailed below) and several smaller high-stakes gambling ventures squirreled away in the recesses of the district. They run Stolzian marriages, too, where lovers are attached to special harnesses before being ceremonially shoved off the side of the tower. There is a chance that the harnesses are attached to nothing whatsoever, and that one or both partners might tumble down and dash themselves apart on the precipice below; should one partner not survive, Stolz clearly viewed the marriage as a bad omen. Should both survive – or both die – it has her blessing. Records show no evidence of Stolzian divorces.

There are a handful of fighting pits where one can go to witness a brawl or two, but none of them hold a candle to the crimson-stained dirt of Arena; perhaps one or two places, if you know the right person to ask, where you could see beautiful young drow carve each other open with knives to the polite clapping of a smoke-wreathed crowd, or the latest in aelfir torture opera too brash or ungraceful to make it big in Amaranth.

And, of course, if you wish to take matters into your own hands, there are clubs that provide that; the Vire Club hosts regular outings down-Spire to the shattered and broken district of Derelictus, where the jaded elite can hunt the wretched abominations crawling out of the edge of the Heart. Or just people, if they'd prefer. Many do.

THE MERMAID

No-one has ever stolen anything from the casino known as the Mermaid – not without dying, anyway. Two years ago, an enterprising young drow tried to steal a pouch of gold coins that a staff member had left foolishly unattended, and two days later he was found dead in the fountain outside of the casino. Five years ago, a member of the Gilded Oyster visiting from Gryffid "accidentally" took a towel home in her luggage after staying at the Mermaid, and her carriage was struck by lightning on the way back to her home country, incinerating all inside.

The Mermaid is under the protection of Stolz, great goddess of luck, beloved by the humans and other short-lived races; Stolz, who lives in the space between the heads and tails on coins, whose rituals are rolled dice and gathered knucklebones, who carries the prayers of a thousand thousand desperate souls on her strong shoulders. The Hearts, who run the place, ensure that none of the games inside are crooked and as such she has graciously extended her aegis to ensure that the club will never lose a sten to theft.

Stolz doesn't have much in the way of churches or holy sites – she's not the sort of goddess people normally erect temples to – and so devout followers, normally relying on personal hearth shrines and sporadic ad-hoc worship, flock to the Mermaid to give their thanks to her. And as the casino has a two-drink minimum, the Hearts aren't complaining.

For more information on advances granted by worshiping Stolz, see page 73.

THE GAME

The game is played with cards, but no-one knows where the cards come from; and they are as much an invitation as they are a playing piece, because somehow they always end up in the right hands – the hands of strange, obsessive and devoted people with the sort of curiosity that gets them killed. Upon the cards are the ancient legends of the dark elves – the Kraken, that once defended the North docks; the Lady who resides on the moon, and whose radiance shines down to bless the drow; the Spider, who squats black and fecund far beneath the earth's surface; the Parasitic; the Labyrinthine; the Eyes of the Chronicle; and so on.

Quite how it is played past this is a matter of much hushed discussion in back rooms and private carriages, of dead-drops and anonymous letters, of secret societies within secret societies. Some believe that the game is played against the universe; some that it isn't being played at all, and those who consider themselves "players" are merely collectors, sifting through the scraps of something ancient and far greater than they will ever be. There are three conflicting rulebooks in existence, two of which were written by the same person. Rounds of the game are played out over weeks and in secret, moves delivered in code by messengers and written in fragments on the walls of forgotten basements. Rules arguments are settled by committee, but seeing as players are few and far between and jealously guard their wins, they are more often settled by murder, poison and threats.

How does one win the game? It's not clear, and even less clear is what you get for winning. Occasionally, players disappear and don't resurface; whether they won or lost remains unclear. Maybe it's a recruitment tool for something, a long-forgotten sect of the dark elves; maybe it's a clever hoax, perpetrated by someone with a printing press and devious imagination; maybe the cards are just windows to the past, bleeding out of the vast stocks of drow esoterica stashed away in the Vermissian Vault, and these are the results of powerful sages using time-skipping magicks to communicate with people in the present day.

DISTRICTS AND FACTIONS OF LOW SOCIETY

DERELICTUS

Buried in the bowels of Spire, Derelictus is a thrice-cursed mess of broken masonry, tunnels to nowhere, and wet runoff from the layers above. Here, the dregs of the populace struggle to survive from day to day, killers stalk the streets, and dark cults practice their wicked arts. What little light there is down here is artificial, or carried by the populace, and the entire place is covered in shadows and dirty magic.

HEMLOCK FRUIT MARKET

The corpsefruit, a drow delicacy, is a soft-fleshed and sickly-sweet thing with sticky yellow fibrous flesh and thick, waxy scarlet skin. They are grown in the Home Nations, but illegal here in Spire. The method of producing corpsefruit is a closely-guarded secret, and six noble houses war over trade routes, expert minds, shipments and graveyards – the one place where corpsefruit can be grown. The drow say the fruit captures the dreams of the dead beneath the earth, and that the longer the dead have lain interred, the sweeter the flesh and the more intoxicating the rush. There are no fewer than eighteen drow operas in the popular canon which include the dreams hidden within corpsefruit as a major plot point.

The aelfir outlawed the fruit in Spire because of its narcotic nature, and distribution has been driven underground along with delivery of any other contraband product from the Home Nations, such as the venomous and urbane whip-snakes, the hypnotic ink of albino cave squid, the vicious crystalline biomechanical implants known as slivers, and so on. In Hemlock Fruit Market, several treacherous underground routes to the Home Nations terminate, and stalls manned by opportunistic drow (and short-lived humans, who have a penchant for delving underground to take things that aren't theirs) dot the floor and walls of the enormous cistern.

Here and there, drow inns and bars – dimly lit by the bioluminescent creatures they've imported – offer a drink, a hot meal, and a place to stay, along with news from the Home Nations, and the opportunity for homesick dark elves to immerse themselves in something approaching their culture. It's not much, but it's the closest thing Derelictus has to a warm welcome.

THE CANNIBALS OF GRIST

When you eat thinking-flesh, or talking-flesh – the flesh of people – you begin to change. Over a number of years, your appetite for the forbidden meat increases, your senses sharpen, the tone fades from your complexion until you are ashen-skinned, and your body becomes lean and muscular and strong save for an elastic gut that can be distended with vast amounts of flesh; you become a ghoul. Cannibalism is banned on pain of capital punishment within the city walls of Spire, but given that the city contains so many people and so few of them have enough food, it's more common than anyone would like.

(Of course, the Carrion-Priests – worshipers of Charnel, the laughing god of corpses – are well-known for eating the bodies of the dead, and most of them avoid madness and change. Instead, as is evident by all depictions of him, Charnel takes that

transformative energy into himself, appearing as a half-drow, half-hyena, with a great swollen gut and a perpetually-smiling canine face.)

Ghouls congregate together, drawn to each other through scent – the sweet stink of rotting flesh exuding through their pores – and mark their territory with bone shrines, taking up residence in corpse pits and harassing the crows and hyenas that peck at corpses in New Heaven. But in Grist, shadowed and desolate Grist that clings to the north side of Derelictus, lit by sickly mage-lights, they have formed a community around a new god.

A hugely bloated and ancient cannibal known as King Teeth resides under the streets of Grist on a reeking pile of splintered bones and half-chewed limbs, and something about his power has drawn in these ghouls to worship him as a god – and, because Grist sits so close to the heart, he can hear their prayers and grant them miracles in return, and the process is driving him irrevocably and utterly insane. A prayer to King Teeth can let you eat a person whole by detaching your jaw from your skull and pushing them, live and screaming, down into your belly; or, if you are among the most devoted, produce a roiling mass of acid in your belly that you can retch up – acid that will dissolve rocks and melt platemail to the wearer's skin in seconds.

The majority of the inhabitants of Grist are luckless, destitute individuals trying to survive from day to day, unable to afford anywhere better to live. And so, in a token effort to placate the ghouls that haunt the streets and stalk the rooftops, they have instituted a system of criminal prosecution that sees offenders (or, in lean months, any outsider they can catch) bound to stakes in the centre of town, awaiting justice for their crimes at the hands of their cannibal masters.

For more details on advances granted by the worship of King Teeth – if you're interested in such a thing – see page 71.

GHOUL

Names: Broken-Hand, Last, Miriam

Descriptors: Clutching a badly-sutured wound, Covered in devotional tattoos to King Teeth, Wearing their old clothes in an attempt to disguise themselves

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Nothing of value, save a few trinkets from their previous life, but their long dirty claws backed up by ropey muscles are (D3, Ongoing D3, Brutal) weapons

THE CHURCH OF ABSOLUTION

The Hungry Deep welcomes all. Here, close to the heart of Spire, a cult of worshippers – exiled priests, madmen, burnt-out drug fiends, and vile magicians – pay their respects to the strongest force in the multiverse: decay. Nothing can last forever – no god, no construction of man or elf, not even the ground upon which Spire is built. Everything will rot, and in this, everything will attain purity. There is no sin, no strife, no struggle in the glorious embrace of nothingness.

The Church set up home in the ruins of an ancient cathedral to no known god or goddess – it was one of the original structures that made up the city that grew into Spire over centuries. Now, they allow other followers of the truth to reside within it, and protect their territory with vicious guarding rituals and wards. Dark creatures scuttle through wrecked stone pews and flap between leering gargoyles, while shadowy figures whisper prayers and love into the darkness that writhes beneath the cathedral – the heart.

They are lead by Mother Falling-Ash-On-Snow – the only aelfir worshipper of the Deep on record. She is lean, verging on gaunt, and such a powerful cleric of the deity that her body courses with energies of decay with every waking moment. Lights dim in her presence; dust and mould blossom on surfaces around her; stagnant water pools at her feet; the sound of buzzing flies surrounds her. She makes frequent trips into the heart through the basement of the cathedral, and returns each time with new instructions and insight from the deep itself.

For details of abilities granted by worship of the Hungry Deep, see page 69.

CULTIST OF THE HUNGRY DEEP

Names: Caelston, Loath, Drend

Descriptors: A refugee gnoll in a tattered cloak, Has milky-blind eyes and no teeth, Pallid-skinned and sunken-cheeked

Difficulty: 0 – The Hungry Deep doesn't attract the best fighters, and membership doesn't encourage a healthy lifestyle

Resistance: 4, or 7 if they're in so deep they've forsaken the luxury of pain

Equipment: Civilian weapons such as knives, clubs, heavy rocks (D3), the occasional dodgy firebomb or explosive (D6, Spread D3, Ranged, Dangerous, One-shot), maybe some bad armour (Armour 2, Heavy)

CIVILISATION

Do you desire the teeth of a giant crow for your dark purposes? Do you want to learn the secret dance that the Fourth Sister whispers to her chosen acolytes, and that unlocks any door? Do you just need a drink? Such things are traded over (and under) the bar in Civilisation.

Unlike almost every other tavern and esoteric market in Derelictus, Civilisation is run by an aelfir – one of the unmasked, who has fallen from polite society, and no longer feels the need to cover their face – except on special occasions. He goes by the name of Lith (derived from his old high-class name, which no-one knows, or dares to utter in his presence), and in addition to being a world-class bartender and expert on the occult, he is a storyteller par excellence. Civilisation is a popular spot for witless journalists and curious travellers to Derelictus, for Lith's tales of the terrors that lurk in the shadows of the district are second to none; whilst serving above-average liquor, he'll spin stories (and even act them out a little), weaving the whole affair into a sort of theatre. The locals come to watch too, some nights, hoping to catch a reaction from someone experiencing Lith for the first time.

On a given night, here are some of the topics on which you might hear him holding forth: the true names of demons, the secret language of corpse-worms, the pallid and bestial cannibals of Grist, the secret roads to New Heaven, and the location of the six midden Mistresses of the Vermissian. Some of them are even true.

PERCH

People were never meant to live in Perch. Strapped, nailed and bolted to the outer wall of Spire, Perch is a patchwork collection of ramshackle and scavenged buildings where those driven out of other communities try their best to make a living. Those who survive more than a month or two are some of the toughest, most resourceful folk in the city – and those born a couple of generations in are exceptional indeed.

THE GUTTER

The only stable structure in Perch is a great overhang from a long-defunct sewer system, a grey stone lump jutting out the side of Spire known as the Gutter. When masonry falls from above, raiders on megacorvids rush the town, or errant skywhales scrape against the city wall, the people of Perch rush and take cover beneath it until danger passes. In less desperate times, the workshops underneath the Gutter supply the town (and much of the rest of Spire) with rope, producing around a mile of cord each week.

Atop the Gutter is the Lady and Crow, an inn designed to provide something approaching comfort to travellers from outside Perch, with rooms of a regular size and floors that are roughly at right-angles to the Spire itself. The owner, an ashen-faced drow called Skinner, takes care to import a small selection of luxury goods for the occasional visitor with money to spend.

A LAND OF SMALL GODS

The main religion practiced in Perch is one of small gods – of spirits living in everyday objects that can be prayed to, worshipped and begged for assistance. (It's hard to worship one thing at a time when your temples keep falling off the side of the building.) Bridges, floors, roofs and nets are prayed to, and nearly every object is adorned with prayers scratched into the surface and charms – feathers, beads, or coloured stones – bound with string and attached to it.

While citizens of Perch certainly own large items – beds, mirrors, paintings, and so on – the common wisdom among them is that anything truly valuable must be able to be carried with you, or better yet, bound into your clothing or bags. Attachment to larger items is seen as foolish, because ownership cannot be guaranteed from day to day.

Chief of all the spirits, though, are those that live in ropes – often the only thing that keeps an inhabitant of Perch from tumbling to their death. A good rope is cared for and prayed to, and hates being apart from its fellows – it's bad luck to not have at least one rope tied between you and something solid. Knotted ropes can form sacred scripture, and the especially religious wear harnesses of tied rope over their normal clothing. (Ropes are commonly used as weapons, too: garrotes, lassoes, whips, rope-daggers and clubs made of heavily-knotted cords are commonplace.)

THE GRAVEYARD OF SMALL GODS

Any object that is owned and loved (or hated) acquires a god as a byproduct of existing, so the sepulchre-keepers in the graveyard of small gods – a series of tunnels carved into the side of the Spire wall – take care of fallen or forgotten items that still possess a spark of the divine. Here, objects wait until the priests

have decreed the gods inside them have passed on, at which point they are sold back to the inhabitants of Perch – or anyone brave enough to visit – at prices that show no clear understanding of market values, from the back of a rickety wagon (itself a god) once every month or so.

While the majority of the items resting in the graveyard are personal goods (weapons, clothes, hats, ropes, etc) there are a wider variety of weirder things tucked away in there, living out the last of their years as faith in them slowly ebbs away from the world. There are altars, and holy books, and sacred symbols from religions that died long ago – the priests try their hardest to acquire them, from within the city and without – and these may pass between keepers, and between generations, as the weight of gods leaves them as peacefully as possible.

THE DOVECOTE

Built into a void in the side of the Spire wall is the Dovecote, a breeding farm for pigeons, doves, ravens and sparrows maintained by a cadre of leather-coated and dropping-stained artisans. Megacorvids are expensive and large, so are rarely found here – but the best carrier pigeons can be, so the Ministry maintains an anonymous account with several bird-masters to ensure that their operatives can communicate over long distances without recourse to miracles.

THE BOUND

As the city's guards rarely venture out into the unstable lands of Perch, justice in the community falls to a small group of vigilantes called the Bound. Wearing trademark harnesses and masks of red-dyed rope and carrying short, sharp blades, the Bound operate as police and judges for their community. Minor infractions are punished with repossession of personal items (and are fairly common), and bigger crimes call for destruction of the criminal's shelter, exile, or – in the direst cases – severing of their rope-gods with those short, sharp knives, and a ceremonial fall from Perch down to the ground below.

(Those knives hold gods, of course, but unlike most everything else in Perch, the gods are not naturally-occurring.)

The Bound are actively sought out by the Ministry for recruitment, given their natural inclination towards taking justice into their own hands and a need to maintain a lithe, athletic frame to move quickly through the unsteady terrain of Perch. The army, too, often sends recruiters up-Spire to Perch in an attempt to lure members of the Bound into active service in special regiments – the Flying 33rd, the Knotsmen, the Red Ropes, and so on.

The current leader of the Bound – if they can be said to have a leader in any traditional sense of the word – is a charismatic human known as Sawsail, who wields two blades with terrifying, bloody efficiency and bears the scars of a long career spent fighting in the gladiator pits of Red Row. Under Sawsail's leadership, the Bound have stamped down on crime, but are veering dangerously close to operating as yet another protection racket.

BOUND VIGILANTE

Names: Kurt, Ana, Cho

Descriptors: Arms wrapped in leather cords, Smoking pungent cigarillos, Wearing a flat cap

Difficulty: 1 on their home turf, and you'd be hard-pressed to find them anywhere else

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Leather pads and tight-knotted rope (Armour 2), a savage-looking blade in which a god lives (D6, Dangerous if you take it off them and use it without desanctifying it first), ropes and other climbing equipment

THE GARDEN DISTRICT

Spire is hungry, and the Garden feeds it. Acres upon acres of land are given over to the production of food, the majority of it able to grow without access to natural light: algae, mushrooms, crustaceans, insects, grubs, and so on. The scant external space there is jealously guarded and given over to the production of fruit, which the aelfir prize and pay a top price for. Throughout the twisting, multilayered depths of the district, quiet resentment is brewing between two opposing groups – the traditionalist dark-farmers of the drow, and the progressive retroengineers of the humans who have managed to manipulate magelights into producing heat and light enough for conventional crops to grow without ever seeing the sun.

It is here, like all poor districts of the city, that the Ministry holds great sway, and thanks to the scant policing from the city guard (supplanted, and some might argue replaced, by enforcers hired by the larger

farm conglomerates to protect their interests) the habitation in the Garden is an easy place to find a sympathetic contact and a place to lay low for a few days while the fallout from your latest endeavour blows over.

THE DARK-FARMERS

The Garden thrums with the activity of the drow, who more than anywhere else in Spire, consider this land their own. Living their lives far beneath the surface of the city, many will never see sunlight (if they can help it) and take every opportunity to shed the protective scarves and cloaks that their more cosmopolitan brethren use to endure the touch of the sun. They favour bare chests and exposed forearms, often covered in tattoos declaring their allegiances, family vengeances, or their devotion to Our Glorious Lady.

These farmers tend to huge copper vats of algae, lit by candlelight, in a variety of bright colours – lush crimson, eye-stinging yellow-blue, vibrant green – and charge a nominal fee for passage across them in rickety gondolas; they husband swarms of chittering locusts and writhing grubs to be ground down into a paste or powder and eaten; they shepherd flocks of crustaceans, scuttling and pallid crabs and crawfish and weirder things besides, to be plucked from the lightless caverns with nets and boiled until ready to eat.

But foremost amongst all their skills, and indeed one of the fields in which the dark elves are the undisputed masters, is the growing of mushrooms.

THE HANGING GARDENS

If you are too poor to afford a proper funeral ceremony for a dead relative up in New Heaven, you can always opt to sell your loved one's body to the Morticians, who will then sell them on to the drow of the Garden district, who will bundle the corpse up in spider-silk and leave it hanging in their cool, winding caverns where they will grow bright red mushrooms from it. These carnivorous fungi have dense, meaty flesh that is calorie-rich and nutritious, and those that can deal with the sensation of eating food that's tended to by spiders and has grown out of a dead body use it as a source of affordable meals. (Down in Hemlock Fruit Market, Hanging Garden mushrooms are something of a delicacy if they're of a good strain, and food-stalls sell bowls of rich, chewy broth made of these red fungi mixed with water, algae and animal bones.)

There are plenty of other places the drow grow mushrooms that don't involve corpses – banks of gently moldering wood and leaf-litter, collected from the external parts of the district late at night, where fungi of all kinds spring forth: mainly for food, though not exclusively. Although drug use is largely illegal in Spire (unless you're an aelfir, of course) the contraband guards have problems telling one mushroom apart from another, and so hallucinogenic toadstools remain a popular method of recreation throughout the lower portions of the city, and in many vision-cults and mystic circles.

THE HYDROPONIC VAULTS

The humans dug out technology from the hoards hidden in the prokatakos arcologies that facilitates crops to grow without needing to feel the light of the sun – lenses and resonators that allow galvanic energy to be routed through magelights to increase their output to a previously unimagined power (strong enough even to burn the skin of the drow, but not as badly as the sun itself).

Though the magelights are as unreliable as any other experimental human technology, there are mighty underground fields of wheat and grain, and groves of fruit-bushes tended to by droves of engineers wearing smoked-glass visors and carrying sharp scythes. While the drow are thankful for the ready supply of affordable food – and anything beats a diet of mushrooms and algae pulp – more radical dark-farmers have begun a campaign of sabotage against the humans, stealing bulbs and hurling wrenches into generators, hoping that they can maintain their superiority as the primary suppliers of food to the city.

THE BEAST OF VAT A-67

"Don't go poking around the vats," say the mothers to their children in the Garden, "or the beast'll get you. The beast loves eating naughty children who don't listen to their mums." Concealing imaginary monsters within the murky depths of algae vats is a common parenting tactic, especially when unsupervised children near the production line have such a high chance of getting injured or drowning. (Also, depending on the parent in question, the beast might venture out of the vats to eat children who don't go to bed on time, or don't eat all their vegetables, or who talk back to their dad, or who stay out after seven-bells; the beast can be remarkably mobile and devoted to parental justice.)

But: the beast is real, at least in Vat A-67, and quite what it might be is the matter of some conjecture. It has tentacles, that much is certain – and whatever it is, it doesn't need to eat very often, only taking a

luckless worker (or a child who didn't listen to their mum) once every month or two. But the algae in Vat A-67 grows fast and rich, presumably as a byproduct of the beast's presence, and so the plant owners are slow to fix, or even acknowledge, the problem.

THE HERALD CORPORATION

A recent addition to the ranks of farms and production lines that make up the Garden, the Herald Corporation is a human-fronted enterprise that seeks to deliver food at affordable prices to the poor. A secular endeavour (which is rare in Spire), the corporation has made great strides into providing cheap but nutritious bread to distribution centres down-Spire, who sell heavy, dense loaves of dark wheat and rye – known colloquially as heralds – for a half-sten apiece.

It is a front, of course, but not for any conspiracy that its detractors might expect. The head of the corporation, a human noble called Devin Quintrel, has been infected by the blood-song of the Vyskant (an interdimensional mind-controlling mantid hivemind parasite) and he is working to spread the disease throughout Spire. At present, reliable infection can only be achieved through blood-to-blood contact or by taking potential carriers to The Cave (page 135), and this is taking far too long. Quintrel aims to embed the Vyskant disease in the bread it sells and spread it that way (and as such is running the business at a considerable loss) but, as of yet, infections are few and far between. However: a stable strain cannot be far away.

THE CITY DRUIDS AND THE LIVING SPIRE

Every city in the world worth its salt has a handful of druids that claim allegiance to the mystical spirit of the metropolis itself, acting as a conduit for the collective power of the people, the infrastructure, the commerce and so on. They can summon blank-faced simulacra of city guards to protect themselves, walk over wet slate roofs as though they were flat, even ground, and direct their ire via the city's closest equivalent to a lightning bolt – a cart, out of control, flattening the victim.

Spire has a handful of these, certainly, but it is so densely-packed with myriad guttermages and renegade clerics that they fade into the background. More worthy of mention are the tight-knit cabal of druids who believe, rightly or wrongly, that Spire is alive, if dormant, or perhaps alive and incapable of movement, and they must attend to its needs and defend it from predators and parasites.

Located within the bounds of the Garden district, in a grove enchanted by the sacrifice of countless animals, the druids come together once a month and listen to the creaking and groaning of Spire, asking it for advice and guidance (they also get loaded on hallucinogens and have a lot of sex in there, too, depending on who you ask). When they emerge, they have a vague plan as to what Spire wants that month based on visions and hunches, and enact it as best they can. At present it seems to focus around sabotaging sections of the Works and attempting to liberate passing skywhales, but odds are they'll run up against someone properly dangerous soon enough.

THE WORKS

Blacktar smoke clings to every surface in the Works: a network of metal gantries, manufacturing plants and storage houses, lined with workers who, eyes on the floor, shuffle through the smoky streets past chained-together indentured drow hammering on steel.

It is here that the wheels of Spire's industry turn. Almost every inch is covered in factories or people, crowded and dark and close and toxic – spend too long in the Works and you bring up sticky black tar with each cough. The noise is the worst part, though, and often deafening: powered presses, the whine of lifts, the scrape of steel on steel and the staccato howls of echolocating creatures.

Gutterkin – a mishmash of goblin, dirt-gnome and weirder things besides – scuttle underfoot and live in vents and pipes and in the overhangs of warehouse eaves, eagerly waiting for someone to rob, or eat, or both. But still – people live here, poor and desperate people, and the Ministry finds many recruits among the drow who spend their lives in the cramped and dangerous conditions of the Works.

SPIREBLACK

In the nooks and crannies of the Works a substance known as spireblack condenses out of the air, brought forth by generations of ceaseless industry, and is

scraped away by the gutterkin (or luckless drow) who sell it for a handful of sten per bag. In its raw form, it is slightly flammable and faintly corrosive, and not much use to anyone aside from the poorest dregs in Derelictus, who burn it to provide light (and copious amounts of foul-smelling smoke).

But refined, spireblack can be formed into explosives (and, indeed, powers most low-quality guns in the city – it's not as stable as human gunpowder, but it's a damn sight cheaper). It can be fashioned into tablets or lozenges which burn like lantern oil; percussive projectiles which explode on contact with a hard surface; fuel for running generators or engines; and remarkably cheap ink, which is used to print salacious pamphlets filled with badly-spelled erotica and tales of murder most foul known collectively as half-sten horrors.

Popular works among the half-sten horrors are *The Duchess's Predilection*, *The Bound Avenger*, *The Beast of Vat A-67* and *She-Priests of Lust: A No-Holds-Barred Investigation Into The Cult Of Sister Spring (Fully Illustrated)*.

THE PRINTING PRESSES

The Works is home to the largest number of printing presses in Spire, and as such, is also home to the largest number of news organisations that have built up around them.

The Furnace is a lurid, sensationalist tabloid that prints outright lies from "sources close to the family" of whatever scandal or tragedy has recently befallen the city; Ambrosia is a pan-religious gossip rag that dishes the dirt on the hottest young priests and templars on the scene today, as well as leading softball investigations into new cults and uprisings; the Silhouette, run by a well-to-do aelfir, details the comings-and-goings of the high society of Spire; the Chronicle is both written and solely intended to be consumed by very serious men in starched collars who like reading about financial trends; the Torch is aimed squarely at the working classes, with its up-Spire paymasters demanding favourable coverage to maintain order and discipline in the lower ranks; and Liberate! (exclamation point required) is the foremost and best organised pro-drow, anti-aelfir publication in the city. While ownership of one of these thin pamphlets is not illegal, it is certainly grounds for a beating and thorough questioning by any guards that find it on you.

Given the danger in communicating openly, the Ministry (and no end of other secret societies and anti-governmental groups) will submit classified ads, or pressure journalist assets to write articles, that contain hidden messages in code. Indeed, last year, there was a famous Births, Marriages and Deaths page in the Chronicle which contained details on precisely zero real people; the papers don't seem to mind so long as they can continue charging for the privilege of printing the words.

GODS OF FIRE, GODS OF METAL, GODS OF PROFIT

Like all of Spire, the Works is a religious place; the cult of Mother Winter of the Solar Pantheon extends down here, as does worship of Our Glorious Lady among the largely drow populace, but the Works has its own gods to which it pays its respects.

The God-Machine is a human-built device, deep in the ruins of Whitecross far to the west. It was created in an attempt to build a deity using scavenged prokatakos logic engines, overloaded with galvanic resonators that give it spasming bursts of unnatural, impossible intelligence – its high-priests and engineers claim that it has godlike powers, and they can discern its machinations through the sea of static it displays onto glass panes that surround it. There are four or five churches to the God-Machine in the Works, most of which are attended by expat humans and technology-orientated drow (as well as no end of experimental theologians from the University of Divine Magic up-Spire).

There are shrines to the Forge-Father and Hearth-Mother in many of the larger factories; these old aelfir gods of creation, since driven out of popularity by the newcomers of the Solar Pantheon, still see worship down in the Works. The Bound Seraph, less a god and more a powerful monster from drow history, is often called upon to help fires stay lit and bellows to fan the furnace. The Masterless Mask, a dark elf folk hero, protects the downtrodden from their oppressors, and they too are worshipped: shrines here and there, prayers muttered to curse your boss, bottles of strong liquor poured onto steaming-hot machinery and the vapours inhaled as tribute.

And more besides are begged for aid: Incarnadine, fallen sister of Azur, goddess of diamonds and deep mysteries; Kuzrukh, whose bones are the mountains; Y'leth, the Dragon Sultan, Who Is The Heart of Every Machine; Molok, towering giant of industry, whose spireblack eyes know only cruel profit; and finally, the Machine Heart.

THE MACHINE HEART

This mostly human cult of strung-out inventors and fringe scientists all agree on one thing: that the city of Spire, like the arcologies found buried beneath the earth, is a structure made by the forerunner race known as the prokatakos (or simply katakos). While this isn't an especially unusual belief within the city, the Harbingers differ from most in that they believe Spire is a broken prokatakos machine – and that they are the ones to repair it.

They don't know what it does when turned on. Many believe that it is intended as a weapon of war, an unassailable floating fortress; others think it is a device that rewrites reality on an unimaginable scale, giving the powers of gods to the mortal races; a select few reckon that it's the last and greatest work of the prokatakos, and whatever it did when they turned it on moved them from here to somewhere else. Or, perhaps, somewhen.

Scavenging prokatakos parts from distant arcologies (or trading vast sums of money for them), the harbingers have been quietly infiltrating factories for the last decade or so, setting up redundancies in the design of manufacturing equipment that can be manipulated to divert their power to a central location – the Machine Heart.

Here, deep within the smoking chaos of the Works, the Machine Heart beats with barely-understood alien technologies wired into creaking networks of steam pipes and fizzing galvanic resonators, and the cult has devoted their lives to using it as a catalyst that will repair Spire and bring it back to working order with them at the helm. So far, they are a long way off their goal, but priests of the Machine Heart can reason with and control machinery in a way that they never could before they devoted their lives to the enterprise – at their command, printing presses halt, cranes swing like extensions of their arms, and lifts can haul many times the weight they're supposed to. The further they move from the Machine Heart, the weaker their influence becomes.

GREYMANOR SERVICES

Three flights of stairs up, above a groaning and creaking printing press, is Greymanor Services. A dilapidated pub sign showing a rather bleak looking castle and the word Greymanor in almost unreadable copperplate is the only thing showing you've come to the right place – the sign itself was installed by the founder of Greymanor Services, a towering ex-knight called Maxwell Roche, who grew tired of the docks and wanted to put his particular skills to use.

Greymanor is hirable for any and all domestic, industrial, political, or paying job imaginable, as long as it falls within the broad field of investigation. The company will happily freelance for anyone with the sten to pay, and do more than their fair share of work for aelfir who don't want to go to the lower levels of the city.

Roche has two unbreakable standards: firstly, he or his staff are paid for every case they take on, up front. Secondly, they are bound by the letter of the law – while they're not above throwing a punch or two to get information, and they're certainly no fools when it comes to defending themselves, their work tends to lead to arrests, and not widows.

Following a series of (almost entirely fictionalised) half-sten horrors about his work, Roche has seen an influx of kids with aspirations of being a hard-bitten detective, and even though he's expanding the business into additional premises, he's turning away far more people than he's hiring.

For more details on joining up to Greymanor and the advances that membership can provide, see page 71.

PTOLEMY BAY

Ptolemy Bay sells guns. He sells huge amounts of guns, produced in-Spire, to people outside of the city who want to kill other people. Working largely outside of the realm of governmental contracts, the devout Azurite provides weapons and ammunition to no fewer than sixteen different revolutionary cells, many of them in the Duchy of Aliquam far to the south, and also to the aelfir, the human mercenaries and the gnoll hunter-caste warriors trying to stamp out those revolutionary cells.

After a series of brutal takeovers, he has secured his position as one of the foremost arms traders in Spire, if not the world, and owns large sections of the Works entirely. The Ministry, aware of his equal-opportunities policy and the rates he charges, would rather not use him to arm the resistance in Spire, but sometimes, needs must.

THE FORGE OF SUN-ON-WATER

Hidden deep in the Works is a lonely forge; this blacksmith's workshop is plausibly the only one in the district that is not concerned with mass production. In the cramped, sweltering room lives Sun-On-Water.

Sun-On-Water will one day be famous. She has rediscovered the ancient aelfir ways of blademaking:

imbuing the blades with sun and moonlight, purifying the metals and blessing them with the oldest rites the high elves know. The weapons are exquisite, and probably the most dangerous pieces of art in the whole of Spire. Only one so far has been found outside of her rooms: a gleaming and elegant dagger, barely as wide as a drow's palm, that will cut through tempered steel as if it were paper. If anyone finds out who made it, Sun-On-Water will become the most precious commodity.

THE PARLIAMENT OF GUTTERKIN

Slish is a runt of a thing – a member of the much-despised gutterkin (a derogatory term for all goblins, gullboys, boggarts, gnoblars and other miscellaneous child-sized greasy humanoids that populate the world), it looks to be mostly made out of at least one crow, bent upwards into a scrawny human form. It caws and mumbles its way through the tunnels of the Works, coughing and hacking up pieces of feather in an unassuming, if gross, sort of way.

But Slish has something that most gutterkin lack: charisma. It has talked to the other gutterkin and engaged in debate. It argues, and bites its opponents – but it doesn't maul them. It is hungry for the fight, for discourse, not the kill. Gathering a band of other dirty-feathered birdfolk around it, it has formed a group with a shared viewpoint – although quite what that viewpoint is is indecipherable to the outside observer.

Slish has its parliament, and other gutterkin are coming under its grimy sway, and rivals are rising up to act against it, and beneath the streets and in the walls and crawlspaces of the Works, a war is brewing – one that most of the inhabitants of the Works will never see.

DISTRICTS AND FACTIONS OF THE OCCULT

THE VERMISSIAN

The Vermissian is a grand failed experiment – an attempt at a mechanised mass transport network throughout Spire. About a century ago, human engineers were tasked with boring out tunnels in the structure of the city and building trains, powered by barely-understood unearthed katakos technology.

Had it worked, it would have revolutionised the way that people lived in Spire. But thanks to the overreaching ambition of the humans who designed it, the cut corners on the aelfir-funded drow work crews that led to tunnel collapses and thousands of injuries, and several notable pushes from the owners of the existing transport infrastructures present in Spire, the Vermissian failed. The skeleton of the thing – a network of unstable tunnels and half-finished stations, unlit caverns full of junked train carriages, and miles of maintenance ducts – remains, and as with all things in Spire, the people put it to use.

What's more, Spire is a strange place, and the act of carving tunnels into it on such a grand scale – coupled with the pulsating hub of psychic weirdness at the centre of the structure – has tweaked those tunnels several feet off-centre of reality. Like a virus spreading through a body, the dark energies of the Heart have spread through the city using the veins of the Vermissian.

ENDLINE

A rusted, precarious mess of discarded carriages and machinery, last visited by officials – according to the records – thirty years ago. Since then, detritus from the junked network has ended up down here, thrown on the pile of jagged metal and broken glass, like silt settling at the bottom of a river.

Given the vast scale of Endline, even though most of the exterior carriages have been stripped of all useful materials, there is always a hope that something valuable is still sitting undiscovered at the centre of it, or in some long-forgotten pocket of machinery. To that end, scavengers swarm over the wreckage and defend their territory with vicious tenacity, spilling blood over new finds or contested access routes through the area.

Here are several gangs of scavengers that will try to kill you and take your things upon entering endline:

the acrobatic Crows, the coiffured and filthy Dandy-boys, the razor-fingered Merkers, the train-worshipping Kerberites, the brash and boastful Butchers and a heretic sect of disheveled Carrion-Priests, exiled from New Heaven, whose arrival is heralded by the howling of emaciated, spittle-flecked hounds.

POLARIS STATION

Intended as the crown jewel of the Vermissian, Polaris Station is now a vast and crumbling ruin taken over by an organisation of black market traders and smugglers who operate on the principle that anything (and anyone) can be bought and sold. Using the tunnels of the network to transport goods through the city and to their stores, Polaris is one of the few places in Spire where the Azurite sect of gold-worshipping trader-priests isn't welcome. The current boss – a towering drow ex-soldier called Vex – has a habit of nailing Azurites to the great clock on the station's facade with reinforced sten coins through their wrists and ankles.

Even with that considered, it's a perfect place to buy something if you don't want any questions asked of you. Just don't wear blue when you visit.

THE LAST TRAIN

Legend has it that there's one train still working on the rails of the Vermissian, powered by Goddess knows what, and it cannot be stopped. Crewed by a collection of engineer-mystics, the Last Train is kept in constant movement, screaming up distant tunnels and, if it can't find rails to guide it, smashing through obstacles and operating on raw momentum until it finds some. The train is headed up with magelights blazing through the dark, the furnace pulses with unknown energy and the entire front car has been converted into an altar through which the inhabitants of the train bargain with, and sometimes steer, the locomotive.

Which is nonsense, obviously. But if someone needed to get somewhere *very quickly indeed*, the Last Train would be the way to do it.

THE SHRINE TO OUR LADY OF VENGEANCE

Deep in the tunnels towards the base of Spire, which are long-flooded with effluvia and runoff from decades of misuse, a cult of extremist dark elves operates a shrine to Lekolé, the blood moon. It is rare for this sect (commonly known as vigilites or crimsons) to maintain stable shrines or temples, given that their religion is not only outlawed by the aelfir but actively opposed by many drow – even those in the Ministry – but here, in the crumbling ruins of a vermissian station, they hold court.

Viewing all occult magic as an assault on the benevolent energies of their mistress, the cult operate cells of agents – many of whom might be someone you know – who silence and kidnap magicians then drag them down here to be drowned in the stinking mire, adding their fear and rage to the burning braziers that line the altar in the centre of what was once Godstreet Station.

THE TERROR OF CANDLEGATE STATION

Jutting out from the edge of Spire over the Blue Market, Candlegate was one of the few exterior stations that was built before construction on the system was indefinitely halted. Few go there now, aside from those truly desperate to escape the authorities, because the station is the domain of the Candlegate Killer – a terrifying and vicious figure, half legitimate threat and half urban legend, who has taken the Candle line as his own.

There is a rite of passage amongst the Compass-boys of the Blue Market, who guide travellers through the shifting passageways of stalls and shops, where a prospective member must travel deep within Candlegate station and light – appropriately – a candle, placing it with the others that surround the mural of the stations that make up the Vermissian. Unlike most rites of passage, this is genuinely dangerous, and about one in twenty boys doesn't make it home from the trek. There are mutterings among the Compass-boys that they're being sacrificed to something dark and terrible.

THE RATS

If you need to get somewhere in Spire – but you can't let anyone see you get there, and speed isn't an issue – then the Rats can help you, for a price. A diverse bunch of outcasts, criminals, and gutterkin, the Rats (some of whom are actual rats) can lead you through the winding tunnels of the Vermissian, navigating the treacherous terrain and avoiding the most obvious threats.

Of course, that's if they're not on the take, and aren't going to deliver you to one of the many corpse-houses squirreled away in the system that supply bodies to the Garden district. And if you don't get

one of the particularly deranged groups, or show weakness or look even slightly robbable, else they'll slice your hamstrings, take your stens and get the hell out of there. But sometimes you have to take what you can get.

A selection of Rats you might meet: Pox, a club-footed drow with a fear of half-open doors; Spurrin, a warty gullman who carves devotional items out of shinbones; Moppet, a toadgirl with a wet sack full of unfertilised spawn, looking for a partner; Greysen, a bent-backed disfigured aelfir poet; Sinder, a human ringleader and guttermage with control over vermin.

BROOK STREET BRIDGE

Nestled on the barrier between down-Spire and up-Spire, Brook Street bridge is hotly-contested territory as it provides the only stable smuggling route for large shipments of goods between the two halves of the city. At the centre, a solid stone bridge twenty feet wide extends over a yawning void beneath, and armed guards patrol both exits.

At present, the "up" side of the bridge is controlled by corrupt guard officers in the pay of the Ivory Quarter's Mister Alas, and the "down" side is also controlled by him, but through a series of false fronts and smokescreens ending in lumbering Red Row enforcers packing scatterguns and clad in thick dirty-black platemail, so he can charge people to use it on both ends.

THE VERMISSIAN VAULT

The drow Home Nations are in turmoil, torn apart by civil war and ancient rivalries. There is a cabal of sages, mages and scholars who have taken it upon themselves to preserve what they can of the splintered, violent history of the dark elves by securing it within the walls of the Vermissian.

The Vault is a term for a collection of storage rooms and libraries that the sect has created over the decades, using the unique powers of the Vermissian to hide things just out-of-step with the real world. For those who know the way, there are vast stores of knowledge and culture hidden within the cracks of the tunnels – the Glass Library where information coalesces like dew on leaves; the Locked Stacks, where knowledge is interred if deemed more useful dead than alive; the halls of the Gadoliv, mute and bandaged servants of the Vault; the Great Museum, where artefacts from lost histories and impossible futures sit side-by-side; and the Anastomosis Device, which leaks lies into the world.

Given their obsession with dark elf history and culture, the Vault is of great interest to the Ministry, and the scholars who tend it are often ministers themselves.

THE HEART

There is a blistering, infectious, otherworldly rot at the centre of Spire; as though the structure is so alien, so impossible, that the deeper one proceeds within, the less hold reality has over the world. The Heart, deep below ground and nestled within mage-warped tunnels and flickering dead ends, is the dead centre of the structure. Rational time and space – as the rest of Spire knows them – are a long-lost memory to the strange things that live there.

If it is impossible to map the city of Spire with any accuracy, it is doubly impossible to map the Heart. Those guides that can be found, huddled in the corners of Derelictus bars staring blankly into their liquor or perched in the ruins of a building on the edge of the Heart, eyes glinting in the dark, ply their trade through intuition, not memory. They feel the space of the Heart the way one would feel the skin of a lover, or warily eye a barking hound, and can smell the routes they're asked to take. Doors and passageways flicker in and out of existence like faulty magelights; corridors constrict and crush trespassers; the floors buckle and undulate, their surface somehow unbreaking.

Many guides are blind, the dark having taken their sight long ago, and few seem to mind. Some are entire family units, their physical senses rotting away, bound together with ropes and string, who will respond as one. None of them are sane.

What follows is a description of things that can be found in the Heart at any given time – and some things that find travellers, and some things that cannot be found unless they wish to be. Some of them are real, and some of them are legends, and some are both.

Such is the way of the Heart.

BLOOD-WITCHES

The Heart carries a disease, and those who wish to can bring it into their bodies. If an occultist is mad enough, or perhaps desperate enough for a quick route to power, they can make a pilgrimage of sorts

into the centre of the Heart, where reality comes unbuckled, and commune with the energies there. Few survive the pilgrimage, let alone the bonding process or the return journey.

For those who seek it out, it takes the form of a blood disease that warps their physical forms and bubbles under the surface of their skin, deforming them into zoetrope horrors with unnatural power over their own blood, and the blood of others – blood-witch.

On paper, the city of Spire is bound by law to declare any witch within its borders dead, and dispatch executioners to correct the oversight through sanctioned murder. But in practice, the witches tend to keep to themselves and operate on the lowest rungs of society, and considering they can pluck a gallon of blood out of your nose at a glance or summon a needle-fingered sprite that eats and replaces your firstborn, the guards tend to leave them alone.

BLOOD-WITCH

Names: Scylla, Kethys, Florence
Descriptors: Hovers just slightly off the ground, Blood drips upwards from her tear ducts, Carrying handfuls of half-dead mice
Difficulty: 0, but 1 if you upset her
Resistance: 6, 12 in her lair
Equipment: Flensing blade (D3, Brutal, Bloodbound), but also muttered hexes in languages that are not only dead, but deliberately executed (D6, Ongoing D6, Devastating, Ranged, Pointblank)

PEACE STREET

Near the boundary of the Heart – as much as it can be said to have a boundary – lies Peace Street, a community of drow and some impoverished humans, who make infrequent trips to Derelictus or Red Row to collect supplies, and who are all shunned and feared when they approach. For Peace Street is a strange place indeed, and it changes those who live there.

Lit by flickering lamplight, the street seems ordinary enough – which itself is tremendously out of the ordinary, for surrounding it is the typical environment of the Heart. Trackless shifting lakes of dust, floating ruins, and caverns that have never felt the touch of light and in which dark and hungry things dwell, border the quiet, suburban street.

In the houses, of which there are around fifty or so, each family lives with the ghosts of their relatives side-by-side with the living. Some of the spectres are as they were in life but immaterial, but death is not always kind, and many bear the marks of their dying – jutting bone, dripping blood, withered limbs or twisted necks. The families say they have always been here, and judging from the age of the ghosts that sleep curled under beds and tucked away in attics, it would seem that there is no "start date" for Peace Street – there is always an older ghost to be found.

The inhabitants eke out a living as guides (although they don't like to go far from their families, and prefer to bring them along on long journeys) and by salvaging unusual items from the Heart – moonstone ornaments, the bones of long-extinct creatures, art produced by no mortal hand, ancient and potent spireblack amber, captured glowbugs the size of a drow's clutched fist, and stranger things besides.

GHOSTS

Names: Tallow-Ren, Herris, Lostlight
Descriptors: Beheaded, Clearly someone's mum, Accompanied by a floating spectral dagger
Difficulty: 0, for the most part
Resistance: 4, but you can't hurt them with normal weapons. Weapons made by aelfir hand circumvent this rule for some reason
Equipment: Nothing tangible, but spectral chains and claws (D3)

THE MOON GARDEN

It is written, in drow holy texts, that the souls of the poor unfortunate race will be freed upon death and travel, up through the night sky to reside in the Moon Garden, a sacred space of calm, where food is abundant, where the scorching sun no longer burns their skin, and where their radiant goddess walks among them in a hundred forms.

And yet: the Moon Garden is here in Spire if you know where to look. When the moon hangs full far above the lightless expanse of the undercity, a seeker can find a gateway ringed with moonsilver-flecked ivy (which should never be touched, much less taken, lest the seeker themselves turn to glinting moonstone and be trapped forever, here) – and stepping through this, and holding the Glorious Lady in their mind, leads them to further gates, and further gates, each increasing in beauty and intricacy of design, until they reach the Garden. (The paths are filled with moonstone statues clutching handfuls of ivy leaves, it should be noted, their eyes endlessly shifting, their static mouths murmuring prayers for aid.)

The Moon Garden is a place of otherworldly beauty, and above it shine strange stars, and the sphere of the world that holds Spire, and the Northern Kingdoms, and the human lands to the west, and Far Nujab and all the territory of the gnolls far beyond, hangs in the sky. There is no colour here, but the land is lit with bright moonlight, and shadowy figures step between the trees and gaze calmly into shimmering reflective pools. There are the spirits of drow that have passed away, and they can be spoken to, and even bargained with, but they are not the same as they were in life.

THE CAVE

From the Cave the Vyskant came, a thousand thousand, teeming and hungry; and from elsewhere the cave came, and it brought with it the dust of centuries, of eons; it has always been here, and it has not always been here, as have the Vyskant.

Listen: you will find the Cave, and if not you then someone like you, because that is what happens to the Cave – it is found, the Vyskant are Known, and the world is never the same again. And you will leave from the Cave, the spiralling etchings resonating in your mind like a struck bell, the weaving patterns and sigils carved into the wall impossibly deep and impossibly fine, and you will bring others here to show them, and they too will Know the Vyskant – and they will bring others, and so on, and so on, and each of them will carry the Vyskant in the space between the atoms of their blood.

Each day the Cave is found for the first time, and each day the resonances that the tiny mantis-like creatures brought with them from a space that slipped between the seconds on clocks echo throughout Spire, and each day their Mother comes closer to being born. It is a strange thing indeed that births its own mother, that lives as a song in the blood of others, but the Vyskant are stranger than you could imagine.

When the Cave is found for the first and final time, the creatures will call their faithful to where their mother will be born, and from their flesh she will erupt glistening and pure.

GNOLL RESEARCH POST

The gnolls of the southlands are secretive, and given that the aelfir are at war with them over ownership of mountainous Far Nujab, their presence in Spire is fraught with the danger of discovery by the Watch or the Solar Guard.

Yet the gnolls are a curious people (and their reputation as feral butchers is propaganda spread by the aelfir and, in part, by the fearsome Mother Moon of Red Row and the hidden masters of the Charnel cult in New Heaven). That curiosity into the unusual has lead them to establish a base, deep behind enemy lines, in the seclusion of the Heart. A cabal of researchers under the leadership of Brother Pitchwood, an ancient and heavily-scarred gnoll professor, has been documenting the weirdnesses of the Heart for the last five years or so, and sending their findings back to their headquarters in distant Al'Marah via bound djinns and subjugated angels of fire.

The gnolls, understanding all too well the warping influence of the vast energies of the Heart, have developed a sort of protective suit that all of their agents wear. These suits are fully enclosed, made from specially-treated sandwalker leather and studded with protective charms that allow the wearer to breathe clean air in the dankest of pits and resist the unknowable power that bleeds out from the tear in reality at the centre of Spire.

Brother Pitchwood and his assistants are not at all friendly, and have no qualms about silencing anyone who discovers their operations for fear they would be uncovered and driven out with brutally effective gnoll weaponry – barbed prey-hooks, gilded shot-cannon, and a wide variety of arcanochemical bombs that ignite, disorientate or flash-freeze their foe. Still: if the rewards are right, they may be persuaded to work alongside a group of ministers to help understand the strange depths of Spire.

BECOMING A VYSKANT HOST

If you welcome the mantid song that is the Vys into your blood, you will find yourself becoming detached from your reality and lost in dreams of another, one sidestep away – a place where swaying towers wrought from glistening bone and gleaming muscle punch through roiling stormclouds; where the song of the Vys spreads through the air like blood in water, projected by quivering resonant stems that pluck the air itself into uncanny shapes; where the ground shakes with the perfect and terrifying breath of the worldmother, waiting here in a womb of her own building that pulses beneath the ground.

You can find the rules for Vyskant infection on page 76.

THE SIGHTLESS BEES AND THEIR KEEPERS

There are swarms of bees in the Heart, blind things, that will never find a flower to feed from and whose bodies are hard, black, and densely furred with curious white markings – and there are those who tend to those bees, a sect of devoted apiarists, who protect the swarm with their lives. It is the bees that reinforce the barrier between the Heart and the outside world; they are creatures of structure and order far older than man or elf, and they will continue to build long after the "intelligent" races have died out.

To see someone killed by the bees is terrifying indeed; the creatures are without stings, but can enforce their structured reality on those who upset the swarm. Compacting around aggressors in a dense, buzzing blanket, they disperse moments later to reveal a perfect crystal statue of their attacker, who is still alive in there, but will never move or speak again. The swarming grounds of the blind bees are dotted with such statues, and it is generally considered a kindness among the denizens of the Heart to shatter them on sight.

THE CORPSE PIT

Where do we go when we die? Most dark elves believe that they will travel to the ethereal Moon Garden; the humans, a divided lot at the best of times, hold a multitude of beliefs but many seem to believe that heaven lies beyond the last horizon; and aelfir believe that their spirits will return to the Soul Seas underneath the permafrost in the far north, and that they will swim with their ancestors in scintillating displays far beneath the ice, and confer their knowledge to the elders of the tribe through dreams and the movements of sea creatures.

But, more pressingly, where do dead bodies go? Many are picked apart by the gore-beaked ravens that haunt the towers of New Heaven, or else end up in a hyena's belly in the dense and winding streets below; some wealthy enough to be interred are buried in the scant areas of dirt in the city; others are sold into the garden district and used as food for mushrooms or algae, serving the city in death one final time.

During the culls, though, where the Medical Corps of the allied forces round up those struck with one of the many illnesses that sweep through the undercity like fire through dry paper, some dead and some nearly, and heave the lot of them down into the Corpse Pit – a great chamber at the centre of Spire that drops down into the very base of the thing. Here, the corpses pile up, and rot, and rats and worms and blind shambling once-corvids pick at the mouldering flesh.

Of particular interest is the worms – they are long and thin and bone-white, almost fragile in their appearance, and quest through mouths and noses to eat the brains of the dead. A cult has risen up around the worms, because through centuries of eating brains and the influence of the Heart of Spire, they possess huge banks of knowledge. Eyeless priests, clad in the stinking vestments of the dead with skin like worm-eaten wood, take the creatures into themselves and let them excrete the wisdom of ages into their brains. These men and women are undeniably mad (as the worms often take more than they give when they enter the brain), but they *know things they shouldn't be able to*, and can even decant the worms into the brain of a fresh corpse and take them back into their bodies to see what the corpse knew.

Of course, if you can't trust the priests, you can always let the worms burrow under your skin and dig into *your* brain.

CARTER'S EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Four hundred years ago, as the humans first made their way across the ocean and before their feats of retroengineering saw them propelled to the heights of civilisation on a par with the ancient elves, Excalibur Carter led a group of brave men and women into the depths of the then drow-controlled Spire to explore the Heart. They never came back.

But: they didn't die, either. They cannot die. (A couple of them have tried it, but they just wake up unharmed in a few hours.) They are trapped here, endlessly searching for the true centre of the Heart, to undo the terrifying wrongness that sustains their bodies. They look healthy enough – and four hundred years of wandering and exploration have given them vast experience and aptitude – but their minds are patchy to say the least.

Should you need a guide, and you don't wish to rely on the blind, toothless lunatics who ply their trade in gutter-bars, you could do worse than Carter's lot. Similarly, if you need to know about anyone or anything in the reality-defying depths of the Heart, odds are they'll know something of it.

THE ENDLESS BACCHANAL

What is beauty? Beauty must be unusual. Beauty must strive to break past the ideals of symmetry and acceptance. True beauty is art – it shocks, it challenges, it grabs the mind and refuses to let go. To see true

beauty, and not the watered-down prettiness of the up-Spire art or the base comeliness of the courtesans in Amaranth, would shatter the mind of all but the strongest intellectual.

That is the theory of Nyr Dirtwise-Towards -The-Unshining-It-Flowered, and it is a theory shared by many of the nightmare witches and hollow-souled hangers-on that surround them. Nyr, once a jaded aelfir noble and the third daughter of an ivory magnate, has descended into the depths of the Heart and come back changed – and more beautiful, Nyr would argue. Transcending gender, social norms and the need for a regular humanoid shape, they resemble a black-and-white zoetrope horror as reality itself stutters and cracks around them.

Nyr has established a party of sorts, a popular destination for truly immoral aelfir or blood-witches who come back too strange to integrate into Spire proper, and it is ongoing. It has been ongoing for twenty-seven years. Inside the weirdly organic halls of Nyr's "palace," as they call it, experiments that straddle the border between art and science are performed under a haze of narcotic smoke and the ear-splitting din of conjured music like nails on a blackboard.

Why anyone sane would want to venture in is beyond knowing – but, on occasion, people too important to lose go missing and are found there, and must be brought back. But that's easier said than done.

VANISHING POINT

In the art academies up-Spire, there are stock images turned out on printing presses that teach students about perspective – pictures of perfectly straight streets stretching away to nothing. At Vanishing Point, one of these streets is real.

Standing on the X marked in the cobbles at the end of the street makes it look perfectly normal (if a little out-of-place for the Heart), but moving to either side reveals that the image shifts as though it were two-dimensional. And yet, you can walk down the street, so long as you stay in the middle of it.

About ten minutes after you enter, you will spot a wanderer in the distance, and soon you will realise that this is a copy of you, a fetch, and it will mirror your actions precisely and meet you in an embrace, then spin and carry on walking the way you entered.

Continue down Vanishing Point and you will emerge into Spire again, except: it is not Spire, it is a drawing of the city, an imagining of it. Books are filled with gibberish, and people are flat, and scenes are played out in loops. It is a poor copy, this parasite Spire, and it is unsettling and unnerving to behold.

And yet: items brought back from this parasite city function differently, doing what they are "supposed" to do. A well-made pistol will never jam or misfire. A person's copy will not need to eat or drink or sleep. A key, blurry when viewed out of the corner of your eye, will easily fit the first lock you push it into.

THE MANSION

The Mansion! A place of doors, and not of names. An endless parade of corridors, of white-masked guardians, of mind-blasted wanderers, of portraits of dead gods and unborn children!

To enter the Mansion, you must write your name on a scrap of paper and nail it to the great oak doorframe, adding it to the countless others that have walked through here. To exit the mansion – well, you simply find the way out. Focus on any door in Spire, place your hand upon a door-handle in the Mansion, then simply open the door and walk through – you will emerge from the door you imagined. If it doesn't work first time, keep trying until it does.

Alas, however – the Mansion keeps your name. It cannot be spoken or written down while it is nailed to the front door, nor can you change it to another, and to use it again you must venture back, back down into the Heart and to the Mansion again, and take your name from the wood. The hundreds, perhaps thousands, of names hammered into the portal show how often a traveller through the Mansion has occasion to return.

THE GUILD OF MORTICIANS

Striding untouched and unchecked through the massed throng of bodies in Spire are the Morticians, the administrants of the thereafter. They run one of the most successful business ventures in the city in service to Mehror, the god of faded light.

The Guild of Morticians is legally responsible for all dead things in the city. Dressed in stark ceremonial black-and-white robes and a variety of monochrome tippets, chimeres, chasubles, mitres, galeri and kalimavkorai, and bearing their spears of office, they are a fearsome sight to behold. Few would dare interrupt the business of a Mortician, especially one in full garb.

THE ADMINISTRANTS OF THE THEREAFTER

The primary function of the Morticians is to properly dispose of corpses, and thereby, ensure that the unquiet spirits of the dead do not plague Spire. Under Spire law it is illegal for anyone other than a Mortician to dispose of a body, so the guild has lucrative ties to the Garden district where it sells on bodies to mushroom farms. Wealthier clients are permitted to be torn apart by the corvids and vultures that cluster and flap about the turrets of New Heaven, and the very wealthiest are interred in one of the few patches of unoccupied dirt in private cemeteries.

(The aelfir view death as a very ugly business indeed, and don't relish the thought of their bodies mouldering, or being pecked apart by crows or eaten by hyenas, and so the majority of high elves opt for a quick cremation.)

But: there is occult power hidden in corpses, an old magic of teeth and bones, of woven hair charms and dead men's hands, and the Morticians deal in this too. Never officially, of course, never on the books, but find a Mortician disreputable enough, ask the right questions and flash the right bribes around, and quickly enough you'll find yourself in the back room of some incense-wreathed temple to Mehror looking through display cabinets of aelfir teeth and labeled fingerbones of the faithful.

UNDYING SURGERY

The real reason the Morticians are so powerful, though, is that through intense ritual and centuries of dedicated medical research, they have conquered death.

Access to the surgical process has a tremendously long waiting list and is prohibitively expensive to the extent that only the wealthiest amongst the inhabitants of Spire could ever hope to afford it, but it cures the disease of death in humans, drow and aelfir. In a process that takes three full days of surgery and prayers, the priests of Mehror within the guild remove the heart of the subject and replace it with a totem – an item that is important to them, something which symbolises their desires and drives, that can push them beyond the veil of death. The heart is packed in specially-treated earth, and continues to beat when separate from the body; should it be destroyed, the subject will perish.

The surgery can only be performed on living participants, and it freezes the subject at the age they elected to have the procedure performed (whether it is better to be made eternal at a young age and be forever beautiful, or wait until you are a little older and have experienced more of the pleasures of life, is a matter of hot debate among the aelfir). And, furthermore, it is not gentle – it ravages and stains the body; it turns the eyes jet-black and the skin porcelain shot through with greyish veins; it takes away the ability of the body to heal through normal means.

The subject no longer needs to eat, or sleep, or breathe, but the desire to do these things remains. Untethered by the possibility of death from old age, the mind of the undying – or the unending, or the pinned, or the oncewas – is allowed to travel to strange places, and while no-one returns from the surgery precisely as they went in, within fifty years of the procedure most subjects are unrecognisable from the person they were beforehand.

While officially-registered surgeons and priests of Mehror give the heart back to the subject (or at least, they say they do), there are less reputable practitioners of the art who'll perform undying surgery on unwilling or desperate patients and give their still-beating hearts to others for "safekeeping." There are legions of enforcers both in the highest echelons of Amaranth and the foulest dens of iniquity in Red Row, undying and eternal, whose hearts are kept by their Lords and who do not feel pain, or need to sleep, and can guard their masters forever.

DEAD MEN WALKING

Due to a strange legal loophole, it is impossible and unlawful to declare a death sentence on criminals or enemies of the city within the boundaries of Spire, and while informal assassinations are carried out on a weekly basis, the business of formal execution has long been forbidden to the rulers of the city.

But: by solving the loophole with another in kind, the council has put capital punishment back on the agenda. While the execution of an individual cannot be ordered by the authorities of Spire, the Morticians are permitted to declare someone legally dead. If the person in question is actually alive, then this oversight in administration must be corrected in-house by a cadre of serious, stony-faced men and women known as Executioners. In addition to the bloody business of killing bound and restrained prisoners, the Executioners are responsible for the subdual, capture and final adjustment of those declared dead who are still at large.

The council, and those that support it, pays well for these administrative corrections, because of the watertight legality of the methods involved. Most Executioners fall into one of two camps: bombastic

PLAYING AN UNDYING CHARACTER

If a character somehow becomes one of the undying, they gain +2 Blood; they no longer feel pain, tiredness or hunger. They don't need to breathe, most poisons and drugs will have no effect whatsoever on their bodies, and they cannot die of old age. In addition, they roll with mastery on Resist checks, no matter the source.

However, something is… lost in the process, aside from their heart; they become jaded and hollow things, unable to satisfy themselves with passions that once thrilled them. In game terms, when they refresh, half the amount of stress removed (rounding up). In addition, magical healing – such as the blessings of Our Glorious Lady, or the magic of the Lajhan – will not work on their animated corpses.

Depending on the professionalism of the surgeon involved, the character may need regular check-ups and maintenance to make sure that their body is still functioning, and failure to attend these check-ups (or a botched surgery) will result in their body crumbling, rotting and coming apart. In game terms, once a character misses a maintenance session, increase the difficulty of all actions they perform by 1 until their ravaged body is repaired.

rabble-rousers, who march at the head of pitch-fork-toting mobs and set buildings on fire to bring their quarry down, or quiet, unassuming individuals who use disguise, hidden weapons and long-range crossbows to bring the vital status of their prey in line with the official record.

EXECUTIONER

Names: Rowan, Slate, Ashe

Descriptors: In full ceremonial garb, Wearing small dark glasses, In a conspicuously smart suit

Difficulty: Executioners are hard-eyed men and women who, if they don't take pleasure in their job, are certainly very good at it. Every action you take against them is difficulty 1, minimum

Resistance: 8. Executioners will commonly surround themselves with angry mobs, each member of which has resistance 3

Special: If an Executioner takes stress from an attack, they can instead take 1 stress and remove a member of the angry mob that's nearby or closer to them as their followers take the attack instead

Equipment: Executioners are permitted to carry whatever equipment they desire to perform their duty. Common armaments are: falcon long-rifle (D6, Accurate, Piercing, Extreme Range, Reload) and knife (D3, Concealable), or: chest-plate (Armour 3), military sabre (D6) and burning brazier (D3, Ongoing D3). Angry mobs carry D3 weapons at best – clubs, daggers, chair legs, boathooks etc.

THE GHOST PLAGUES

Twice in the last fifty years, the Morticians have faltered in their sacred duty due to internal conflict, arcane levels of bureaucracy or external competitors such as the Charnel-worshipping sect of hyena worshipers that currently holds half of New Heaven under their control. During these times, the dead are stacked like firewood inside the corpse-halls of the Guild and last rites are rushed and incomplete. Angry ghosts, furious at the treatment of their mortal forms in the hands of the Guild, appear with increasing frequency – standing mutely outside Mortician offices pointing inside, draining the life out of bystanders in dark alleys, whispering from patches of shadow into the ears of madmen.

Unfortunately, the prime target of the ghosts' attentions is the Morticians, responsible as they are for their cursed afterlife, and so an already dire problem quickly becomes even harder to solve. Those killed by ghosts often become ghosts themselves, thanks to the torment of the killing. Should the number of spirits reach a critical mass then the spectral energy will begin to amalgamate in the form of a spirit host – a many-faced, towering incorporeal beast of a thing with tremendous psychic power, able to snap-freeze a street to ice in a matter of seconds or scatter groups of men as if they were children's toys.

SPIRIT HOST

Names: Individual names are lost within the horde, but it may refer to itself as We Who Are Lost, Those Who Have Returned or A Thousand Broken Fingernails

Descriptors: A hivemind swarm of spectral orphans crawling up the walls, The labourers caught in last month's tunnel collapse wielding industrial rockbreaking equipment, A fanged centaur made out of an amalgamation of drow and human body parts

Difficulty: 1, but you can't fight it with mortal, unenchanted weapons. Weapons or items of fine aelfir make can hurt it though

Resistance: 15 and, unless laid to rest, it will reform the next night

Equipment: Miscellaneous hurled items (D3, Ranged) and lumps of masonry or a terrifying chill touch (D8)

THE NECROPOLIS

Since the arrival of the Carrion-Priests, refugees of ghost cities to the south, the Morticians have ceded control of huge sections of New Heaven and retreated to what is now known as the Necropolis – a huge central chamber that connects the upper levels of Spire to the Garden district.

Built around a single vast vertical tunnel ringed with spiral stairs and corridors to dusty mausoleums, the Necropolis is a dead and quiet place. Though patrolled by Morticians and armed groups of devoted brethren, few trespassers enter here; it is riddled with ghosts, and even those without the ken of seeing the restless dead get a sense that something is awry the second they set foot within the chamber. Folk on official business, such as visiting the grave of a loved one or selling a body to the Hanging Gardens below, tend to conduct their affairs quickly and get back to the world of the living as soon as possible.

MORTICIAN GUARDS

Names: Quoth, Drendt, Pollax

Descriptors: Wearing black and white robes, Bearing the bones of their loved ones, Supported by arcane-looking leg braces

Difficulty: 0 at the main gates; 1 as you approach the inner sanctums

Resistance: 6

Equipment: Heavy "ceremonial" curved swords (D6, Parry, Tiring), shields painted with devotional images of Mehror (Armour 2)

A CITY OF GHOSTS

Most folk cannot see ghosts; the Morticians know the trick, and some Carrion-Priest rites can push the caster's soul two steps closer to death and allow them to talk to, touch and even fight (or make love to) spectres. Unless a ghost holds a strong enough resonance to manifest visibly in the physical world, the majority of people will ignore them entirely, or sense them as an aberration: sudden temperature drops, a single whispered phrase, cracking glass, or ominous dreams.

To have the Sight and visit the Necropolis is to see it for what it truly is: a bustling city of the dead, overburdened with spirits that bicker and argue, that live their unlives as best they can before even their ghosts crumble away to nothing. Gangs of dead urchins gather on the spiral steps and hustle for ethereal coins; traders sell spectral jars of something from stalls that jut out of walls; nobles hover in mid-air, too haughty to consider setting foot on the ground again.

Many are utterly insane by mortal standards, and their society works in a way that the living could never really hope to fathom, although a variety of Morticians have attempted to scribe books on the subject. They are jealous of the living, and most resent any intrusion, though some may appreciate news from the outside world.

THE HALL OF ANCESTORS

It was the fashion, once upon a time, for moneyed residents of Spire to preserve their dead relatives by removing their internal organs, filling them with sawdust and treating their skin with noxious chemicals to ensure that they would stay beautiful for eternity. These corpses would be given pride of place in their

SPEAK WITH DEAD

Here are a handful of methods for viewing, speaking to or interacting with the normally-intangible spirits of the dead that fill the Necropolis. Some of them even work.

- Hire a spirit board carrier, usually a bent-backed gutterkin or a penitent Mortician, who attaches a board covered in letters and common phrases on their back and crouches in front of you, their arms bent painfully behind themselves, scrabbling at the board as they enter a trance and let spirits possess them to talk to you by pointing at symbols
- Drink a specially-prepared draught, rumoured to be run-off from undying surgery, that causes tremendous nausea and mild death-like effects, allowing spirits to interact freely with the user
- Cover yourself in raven bones taken from the Towers of Silence in New Heaven
- Catch and kill one of the biggest, meanest hyenas protected by the followers of Charnel, and wear its wet, uncured pelt
- Acquire an original Vermissian ticket officer uniform (of which there are four remaining) and an unstamped ticket from the maiden voyage of the Arterial Line
- Leap from the top of Spire and survive, and your terrified ghost will manifest beside you and allow you to talk to other spirits
- Build a complete saint from bodily relics purchased in Pilgrim's Walk and use it to compel spirits into obedience

homes (generally in some sort of realistic or idealised pose, such as hunting, singing, or delivering an inspirational speech) or, if the family didn't have the space or inclination to keep them at home, stored in the Hall of Ancestors situated towards the top of the Necropolis.

High elves are mercurial, though, and when the current trend of cremation (or for the truly wealthy, aetheric absolution) came into fashion, the remaining stuffed corpses were sent down to the Hall and promptly forgotten about.

The Hall of Ancestors is a grim place, now massively under-funded and tended to by a handful of stewards and janitors as ancient and dusty as the corpses themselves. Moth-eaten, threadbare mauve carpet lines vast halls where the noble dead are stacked up like mannequins in a warehouse – the fourth Chancellor-Viscount of House Gryndel is currently laid sideways over Lord Halcyon Stars-Softly-Shine as he sits on his throne and pets a hunting hound that is no longer there.

Three generations of minor Thespian-Legislators are jammed into the same broom cupboard. A family of rats have taken up residence in the body of a beautiful aelfir girl whose name has been lost to history, and they sneak out to steal biscuit crumbs from the nearby break-room a few times a week. One half of a dancing couple holds out his arms to the darkness, his partner long ago sold off to fuel a dark ritual in Derelictus. A group of stuffed drow servants pantomime-weep around the body of a master who has since been relocated.

Few even among the Morticians visit here, and with good reason; it is a perverse place, and the mad spirits of the preserved corpses collect in the rafters like mildew.

THE RETRO-ASTROLOGISTS OF THE OBSIDIAN ORRERY

Seers have long looked to the stars to determine the path of the future; in the Obsidian Orrery, a sect of ghost-speaking aelfir soothsayers has decided to take things into their own hands. Plunging a huge amount of resources (both physical and magical) into the project, they have created a fully-realised mechanised model of the stars and planets that allows them to scry into the future with uncanny accuracy; where the night sky may be obscured by clouds, or the smoke that pours from the Works and the chimneys that stud the outer surface of Spire, the sky in the Obsidian Orrery (as it was named, due to the primary material in its construction) is always visible.

But: the futures the Orrery's astrologers scryed were not always ideal, and they came together in agreement – if they could change the stars, they could change the future, and sell good fortune to the highest bidder. With the cultural inclination of the aelfir to believe their own work superior to the natural world, coupled with a cocktail of sacrifices and narcotic-fuelled visions, the sect came to realise – in their own way – that their map was more accurate than the real thing, and therefore could be modified and tweaked to create futures that better suited them.

Unsettlingly, it works. The mechanical stars work just as well as the "real" ones far above, as far as the sect's predictions are concerned, and they can be nudged into more favourable configurations. It's not always perfect – soothsaying never is – but for the right price, the priest-engineers will don ceremonial overalls and reach their long, delicate arms into the whirring machinery of the simulated heavens and pull. Stars will shift into and out of alignment, planets can be forcibly put into retrograde, and new constellations will blossom into focus. Cults waiting for the stars to be right can wait hundreds of years – or they can get together enough silver to enter the Necropolis and bargain with the keepers of the Orrery for a beneficial night sky tomorrow.

UNDYING SURGERIES IN THE NECROPOLIS

Chief among the sorceries of the Morticians is the trick of making someone undying – plucking out their heart and replace it with a totem, turning their skin unaging and translucent, pinning them in place at a year of their choosing. It is *de rigeur* for a moneyed aelfir to have the surgery around their fortieth year, but unfortunate side effects (ranging from moth infestation, to oily leakage around the eyes and nose, to the need for regular infusions of chemicals to stop the smell) mean that some put it off until later.

Those who take the plunge will travel to New Heaven or, more likely, to the surgeons of the Necropolis. In an effort to encourage competition and innovation (and due to a loophole in the ordinances) each surgeon is officially governed not by the Morticians but by themselves, leading to a wide variance in quality of treatment throughout the district. Near the entrances, you'll find desperate, semi-skilled opportunists with enough money to rent a dingy office and a stone slab, and while they offer competitive prices (or try to rip off unsuspecting rubes) their results are far from ideal. Further up-Spire, in warren-like offices of leather and imported mahogany, the elite surgeons cater to their clientele's wishes with utmost politeness and efficiency.

In the cigar-smoke-wreathed rooms of a top-tier undying surgeon, one can negotiate for all manner of modifications to one's body to be performed at the same time as the main process itself – the unique energies allow for surgeries that would kill a living creature, or at the very least come with a huge risk of rejection. Bundles of muscle, taken from luckless Red Row enforcers, can be grafted onto the arms and legs to allow for prodigious strength; the eyes of predatory creatures can be implanted in a patient's sockets, sharpening their perception; or, as is the latest fashion amongst the truly wealthy, the body can be stripped down to component parts – exposed bone, muscle strung taught over a silver frame, organs encased in glass – all to expose the beauty of the surgeon's work.

THE CULT OF NECROFUSIMANCY

There are those among the Morticians who dwell in the Necropolis (and elsewhere, but much of the sect is focused within the guild) who believe that the city of Spire is the corpse of something ancient, long-ago turned to stone – that the cobbles of its streets are bones, that it held eyes in the indentations along its side, that the huge, empty caverns within once functioned as lungs. These magicians, straddling the line between Mehror worship and black magic, propose that the city's corpse can be manipulated like that of any other creature – except, given the relative scales involved, on a much finer gradient than usual.

Necrofusimancers are famed for reading omens in the patterns on the ceiling, praying over broken windows and being unable to understand the people that surround them as anything other than carrion-feeders or parasites – not a lot of fun at parties, in other words. But they are nigh-impossible to catch if hunted; corridors shudder and close sphincter-like behind them, they cannot get lost within the walls of the city, and they can sense their position and walk quite comfortably in pitch-black rooms.

THE LIBRARY OF SNUFFED CANDLES

Part of proper Mehror worship is to venerate things that once were but no longer are: the Prince of Snuffed Candles adores the lost, the all-but-forgotten, the illegible etchings on a wind-worn gravestone. The Library of Snuffed Candles is part vault and part devotional temple, and its keepers make it their life's work to conserve and retain knowledge.

Here, there are the last of things – the only copies of cursed books, damned nearly beyond existence by a hundred vengeful gods; full, illustrated family trees of the doomed House of Starys, whose lords and ladies paid for their hubris with the collapse of Fathom into the black waters of the Shadowed Sea; and even people, kept in gilded cages, who are the last speakers of a particular Home Nations dialect or the last monks of a long-dead goddess.

(And, of course, there are reams and reams of boring information, too, so long as it is obscure and there is only one of it. The old laws and ordinances of Spire are held here, along with zoning information, police reports, terrible romantic poetry, and so on. The most pious priests make no distinction between hidden codes, thousands of years old, carved in gold tablets by godsblood avatars, and someone's shopping list. But even then, they are not idiots, and realise the relative value of the information to others, and protect their treasures accordingly. It is not wise to break into the vaults of the most prominent death cult in Spire; their curses are legendary, and can wither a drow to dust in a matter of seconds should they not speak the right pass-phrase when prompted.)

Copying the information is forbidden, and reading it is frowned upon – the non-faithful are rarely granted access without first gaining the authority to do so from the upper echelons of the government (most break in, or forge the paperwork). But for the devoted and adventurous seeker – many of whom have joined the ranks of the Vermissian Sages – there is much to be found.

THE GRAVEYARDS

Hidden within the Spire, the dead lay at rest. While most are heaped upon the Towers of Silence in New Heaven, or sold on to the Hanging Gardens to host fungal blooms, or cremated in ceremonial fire, some sects and cultures present in the city – many of whom are devotees of Mehror himself – require their bodies to be buried in soft earth until the flesh rots away. Given the lack of ground available in Spire, many choose to be buried in the foothills outside the city, but for those can that afford it there are spiderweb warrens burrowing through, and underneath, the districts of Spire.

In some places – the more exclusive areas – the ground is well-tended, grass-like weavings cover the soil where beneath the bones moulder and decay, and visits are well-orchestrated with offerings of light refreshments, devotional readings, professional mourners-for-hire and on-site private security to ensure that one's grave goods aren't stolen by opportunistic grave robbers.

Elsewhere, the soft earth churns with worms, and corpses are hurled into stinking mass graves by uncaring crypt-keepers; in other corridors, the dry bones of the dead are numbered and stored in drawers and cupboards, on shelves and in sarcophagi, awaiting instructions from their heavenly masters. You are never more than six feet from a corpse, in Spire, it is said.

THE GRAND TEMPLE OF MEHROR

It is here that Mehror, the god of snuffed candles, the prince of echoes, is worshipped, and all other temples built in his name are but a reflection of this great edifice, carved from the original stone of Spire in ages past. Its coffers are stuffed with donations from funerals, devotional tithes from those who choose to live their lives in service to the god, and illegal reselling of mortal remains to occult practitioners. Located near the base of the district, it is open to all – and given that the place is usually lousy with living worshippers, most ghosts avoid it.

Becoming a priest of Mehror is one of the few ways that a drow born into poverty can hope to legally ascend the social ranks in Spire; regardless of their origin, Morticians are regarded with respect and often offered positions of relative power within the city (at present, they do not have a representative on the Council, but two of the seven members are undying, and thus at least owe them a favour). But: the initiation process is tough, and few possess the devotion to the arts of death and the required nihilism to make much progress within the church.

CHOKE

In a land of grey robes and shadows, Choke is a riot of life and colour. Here, clinging to the sides of the narrowest part of the stairwell that forms the Necropolis, drow, humans and aelfir alike come to ply their trades. Primarily, the business of Choke is one of fortunes, and many who seek guidance make their way into the winding streets and rickety gantries looking for answers; this is a place suffused with the energies of death, and the walls between worlds (and past, present and future) are weak here.

In the flashing colours and smoking lanterns of Choke, you can have your palm read for a handful of sten, chat to the spirit of a long-dead loved one, or make contact with heretical sects of Scryatrices who were cast out of the church of Our Glorious Lady for daring to seek the forbidden strands of time and chance. Of course, not all of Choke is bright and colourful, looking to entice desperate travellers and separate them from their money; there are grave-robbers, some of whom have done well enough to establish semi-permanent offices and boutiques selling grave goods and "relics", too, along with a swarm of around a hundred or so rope-makers, bridge-builders and scaffolders, many of whom have been exiled from Perch, who keep the entire district from collapsing into the void below.

FORTUNE TELLING METHODS

- Knucklebones, marked with sigils and tossed like dice, often onto "maps" covered in occult and abstract imagery that the caster interprets depending on which bone lands where
- Scrying bowls and mirrors, devoted to the drow goddesses – a bowl of clear water for Our Glorious Lady, a black-lacquered mirror for Our Hidden Mistress, and a vessel filled with warm blood for the Crimson Vigil
- Sibyls and oracles who risk their bodies and minds by ingesting or inhaling vast quantities of psychoactive substances to bring them closer to the divine
- Austromancy, whose practitioners line the gantries and stairwells and listen to the winds howling up and down Spire, and blindly scrawl their predictions on their arms and bodies in hurried, inky scratches
- A Malrique deck, so named after the seers of the drow House Malrique, which features elements from all nine noble houses of the dark elves and sets them against each other in illustrative, allegorical wars. Played by two fortune-tellers at once, each taking a side, the events dictated in the cards as they are played against each other refer to ancient wars between the houses, as well as to events that have yet to come to pass
- An aelfir sect of haruspices who gut creatures and examine their entrails to cast light on the future – there is a sanctity in the innards of a creature, they believe, unseen by mortal or divine eyes, and from that they can extrapolate potential events. The more unique the creature, the more accurate the foretelling, and as such the aelfir have taken to procuring strange gutterkin to sacrifice for their art – or, in the direst cases, performing the act upon one of their own

THE MIDWIVES

If the legends are to be believed, when the drow were cursed with the affliction that drove them underground to flee the sun's light, they lost the ability to carry their young to term. Bargaining with ancient allies, they cast around desperately to find a way to sustain their doomed race – and they found it, in the form of Ishkrah, the fierce and conniving mother of spiders. In exchange, Ishkrah's children crept into the drow's bloodline, so they could be closer to the elves, and become more beautiful than ever.

Whether this story is true or not, drow young emerge from their mothers around a month after conception in a translucent egg-sac, and this sac is secreted away and fed blood through its membrane for a further six months until the young drow is ready to emerge. What's more, some rare drow carry spider-like traits – additional limbs and eyes, thick cartilaginous hairs on their forearms and palms, exoskeletal plates, mandibles, and spinnerets.

These strange elves are treated with a mixture of devotion and fear by the drow community, but the majority of them – if they survive gestation and the first few difficult years of their lives – will join the Midwives, an ancient guild devoted to the survival of the dark elf race.

THE DARK ARTS OF ISHKRAH

The midwives are trained, through meditation and occult magic, to augment their spider-blood traits until they are truly terrifying to behold. Two extra eyes shift into eight, providing uncanny perception; the fingertips and the soles of the feet grow long gripping hairs, allowing them to effortlessly climb sheer surfaces; tough skin hardens to an iridescent carapace; faces distort into furred mandibles, dripping with paralysing venom; arms and legs split into multiple limbs; and spinnerets pucker and blossom from abdomens, ready to weave fine webs of glistening silk to trap their prey.

A true mistress of the art – all midwives are female – can crack and remould their humanoid form into something utterly other, a nightmare mixture of drow and spider, a chittering, towering, arachnid-centaur horror that few can hope to best in combat.

MIDWIFE

Names: Shellae, Hekate, Ishkin
Descriptors: Wearing a jewelled veil, Has two extra arms, Wrapped in red silk

Difficulty: If you fight a midwife in her lair (and why would you?), her home advantage gives her difficulty 2 on account of the webs and darkness. Otherwise, difficulty 0

Resistance: 6, or 10 if she's in her lair

Equipment: None, save ritual and ceremonial garb and instruments. But her attacks are either venomous fangs (D6) or multiple barbed limbs (D6, Brutal) and she has D6 Armour, rolled at the start of the situation, to represent how much chitinous exoskeleton she can summon to protect herself

STRUCTURE

The organisation of the guild depends largely on the level of society in which they find themselves operating. Up-spire, where monied drow have handed their loyalties over wholesale to the aelfir, they function as live-in carers to guide the family through the process of birth and caring for the undeveloped fetus as well as advising on the correct vintage of blood to feed it.

In mid-Spire, the midwives operate incubation houses, kept as best they can at the optimal breeding temperature, and guarded by a die-hard detachment of spider-blooded drow. These are some of the most valuable places to the drow race in Spire: each house can hold as many as half a thousand unborn drow in different stages of development. Midwives are therefore trained in not only medical care but how to utilise their unique biology and occult arts to better defend the future of their race. Anyone assaulting an incubation house with an intent to abduct or destroy the unborn children of their enemies will be faced with a tightly-knit squad of many-limbed, mandibled terrors that scuttle along the ceiling as though it were the floor and boast a carapace tough enough to turn away sword-strikes and pistol-shot.

In the undercity – in the back alleys of Red Row and the desolate streets of Derelictus – the midwives occupy a more socially supportive role, offering medical and emotional support to those who need it (and those who can afford it). An undercity midwife is a terror to behold indeed – often working alone, and often one of the more mutated and strange of her kin, the midwife will defend the inhabitants of her neighbourhood, both born and unborn, with vicious tenacity. In a practice used by midwives throughout Spire, undercity members of the guild in particular rely on assistance from actual spiders to tend to the eggs and make sure the membranes are intact.

It is not at all uncommon for a midwife and a blood-witch to set up shop in the same territory – the midwife's clutch-cave lying within the borders of what the blood-witch considers to be her domain – and the resulting conflict is as bloody as it is long. (The blood-witch midwife, Maji-Mal, is one of a kind, and her brood of hatchlings enchanted and fed with her own diseased blood are far, far away from what any reasonable citizen of Spire would consider to be drow.)

BLOOD VINTAGES

While some drow use only their own blood or that of their midwife to feed their undeveloped children, it is considered smart among high society to ensure that the fetus receives the best blood available. The precise nature of this blood is up to the midwife in question – some believe that the blood of a strong animal, such as an ox or megacorvid, is the best means to give nourishment; others swear by using the blood from one of the eight great dark elf houses to ensure that the child is given a proper upbringing.

Vials of blood from dark elf heroes, preserved through uncanny means by the occult arts of the midwives, can change hands for exceptional sums of money. A crystal philtre drawn from the Underqueen of Yssen on the eve of her victorious battle at Crimson Tooth earned over ten thousand darnarian in a private auction last year, and there is a well-known drow folk tale about a beautiful assassin who seduces men of power and influence before draining them dry to feed her children.

It is not uncommon for a drow of good standing who is down on their luck to sell their blood for profit, and even less uncommon for a drow of poor standing to do the same and lie about their heritage. The libraries of the midwives have great tomes of lineage and augury that can determine the true nature of a drow's blood: tomes that the interdimensional scholars of the Vermissian are all too keen to get their hands on and protect.

DISTRICTS AND FACTIONS OF ORDER

THE CITY GUARD

Someone's got to keep the peace. In Red Row, that job falls to several rival gangs of enforcers; in the Council chambers, the black guard of the aelfir maintain a silent vigil, armed and armoured with the best the city has to offer; in Perch, the justice-cult known as the Bound punish wrongdoers by kicking them off the side of the Spire itself. But, for the majority of the city, day-to-day law enforcement is handled by the city guard.

It's a thankless job. On one side, guards have their aelfir paymasters treating them like a personal staff, and arresting someone who might have connections up-Spire becomes a nightmare web of etiquette that most guards simply don't bother with. (Of course: aelfir are above the law, and they see it as a frippery that the lower races need to put in place to stop them from killing each other. No drow guard could ever hope to arrest an aelfir, unless that aelfir was *tremendously* unpopular and the guard in question brought a lot of friends with them.)

On the other side, guards have the entire city trying to break the law. And the average guard isn't some hard-nosed, iron-willed bastard – they're local folk who're doing their best to earn a wage, and many of them are genuinely trying to make Spire a better place to live. Odds are, if you see a guard walking down the street in your neighbourhood, you'll know his name – or his sister's name, or that his mum runs the bar down the road, and so on.

The official laws of Spire are detailed in eighteen tomes, all of which are competitively updated by a Warrior-Poet and a Calligrapher-Attorney who were at one point married and are using the legal charter of the city as a battleground for their old disputes.

Which means, of course, that there are lots of strange laws that no-one obeys – no carrying a pig on Sunday in the North Docks, each able-bodied human in the Works is to craft and give five arrows a week to the military HQ, a Spire-wide smoking ban, etc – but also that the waters of law have become so impressively muddied that *anyone* in the city is arrestable at any time, and it's a matter of how vindictive the guards are feeling that day as to whether they want to arrest them or not.

(For example: malak, a mild depressant taken in tincture form by drow that is as popular as tea or coffee in the Home Nations, has been made illegal in Spire. Not because it's dangerous, or because the aelfir care about the side-effects it might have on users, but because it gave the guard a valid excuse to search drow on the street and raid their homes looking for evidence.)

The guards' main business is patrolling, and attempting to stop outright law-breaking in public places, as well as breaking up fights that threaten to escalate into serious property damage or murder.

For more information on joining the City Guard and the advances this provides, see psge 69.

CITY GUARD

Names: Reyen, Anton, Sallomme
Descriptors: Wearing armour one size too large, Clutching a spireblack lantern, Carrying sandwiches in a brown paper bag
Difficulty: 0
Resistance: 5
Equipment: Light armour (2), Club (D3) if they're on patrol or Halberd (D6, Brutal) if they're on guard duty, occasionally a jackdaw pistol (D6, Piercing, Reload, Ranged)

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

An outpost holds around 10-15 guard; a garrison can easily support more than twice that number. These strongholds are built primarily as defensive measures, giving the authorities and the aelfir a place to hold up during periods of insurrection, but they also provide weapons and armour for the guard and limited incarceration facilities for criminals.

VORLOREN STANDARD: Named after the old warehouse it's built in, this is widely regarded as the worst posting in all of Spire as it backs onto the lawless district of Red Row. The entire staff is made up of bloodthirsty lunatics, social climbers who upset the wrong guard captain, and pretty much anyone who tries to investigate corruption in the upper echelons of the organisation.

GREENWAY: Chief border control on the Garden, looking to intercept the massive shipments of hallucinogenic mushrooms headed down-Spire to the undercity drug capital: Threadneedle Square.

BLACKWATER LINK: Sole guard post in the knight-controlled North Docks, which attracts the sort of anally-retentive stickler for paperwork that's sick and tired of the Knights flaunting their authority without any sort of proper overhead. Their Letters of Notice are legendary, and they seem to be on a quest to shut down as many bars in the region as they can for Health and Safety violations.

HIGHMOON PRECINCT: Defenders of the southern segment of the Works, who boast over three guns per officer and, to be frank, an over-zealous desire to use them.

OUR LADY'S GATE: A precinct made up of local boys and girls who protect the Cathedral of Our Glorious Lady in mid-Spire. Famously pro-drow, although not so much that they can be openly anti-aelfir.

RELEVANT LAWS

Any crime against an aelfir is automatically worse than that same crime against a non-aelfir in terms of the punishment, fine and investigation that follows (in game terms, increase the stress dice one step when players are trying to cover their tracks or evade justice).

Generally speaking, any weapon that inflicts D6 stress or higher is illegal to carry and own in Spire. Upon finding such weapons, guards will confiscate them and fine (or arrest) the owner.

Knights of the North Docks are permitted to carry any edged weapon they want, as well as lances. This upsets the city guard no end.

Firearm ownership is banned, and every gun in Spire is officially the property of the city, but thousands go missing or change hands every month.

Practicing demonological magic is highly illegal, but it's above the pay grade of the average city guard, who will probably defer the problem to more senior officers. Other occult magic is frowned upon by most of the general populace, including the guard.

There are nine forbidden faiths, as laid out by the council, and the punishment for membership is execution, exile, indentured servitude, "extended interrogation," etc. The two most relevant of these faiths are worship of Lombre (Our Hidden Mistress) and Lekolé (Our Crimson Vigil) – the names of three of the remaining five faiths can't be spoken aloud in Spire on pain of death, and indeed are stricken from all but the most secret of records, so almost no-one knows what they are.

Wearing of masks is required in aelfir districts (it used to be Spire-wide, but it didn't catch on) – namely in Amaranth, the Elven Quarter in the Blue Docks, and the Council chambers and surrounding area. Those caught without a mask will be roughed up and evicted from the area, or put in jail for a few days to think about what they've done.

THE SECRET POLICE

The average member of the guard isn't big on investigation – and indeed, digging too deep into problems is dissuaded by their superiors in HQ – so any of them who want to get their hands dirty and start working out who did crimes and why and possibly how they can stop *future* crimes generally has to do so pretty quietly, and on their own time too.

Still, there is a small collection of such individuals within the ranks of the guard – one every garrison or so, and more in objectionable postings – who believe that crime-fighting is more than breaking up fights at bars and making sure nothing that gets thrown at visiting dignitaries makes it through the shield-wall. These individuals get together (usually over a bottle of rotgut after the day shift, or strong coffee after the night shift) and share information, looking to plot

crime as it spreads across Spire and stop it before it worsens.

The majority of them aren't going to get anywhere, and are cursed to a life of connecting newspaper clippings together with red string on the walls of their one-bedroomed flats, but some of them have a flair for investigation and have uncovered some interesting things. Most of the time, these lead back to aelfir interests (and as such have to be quietly ignored) but they are coming close to shining some light on the Ministry, and it's a matter of time before they're recruited, discredited or killed.

THE HIVE

Deep in the central structure of Spire, in the original bonerock, is the Hive. This is the guard's primary jail and headquarters, a brutalist grey slab of a building with a hexagonal honeycomb structure. Here, the guard corps meet with dignitaries from up-Spire to provide an update on the populace, and hold some of their most dangerous criminals.

Extended imprisonment is a rare punishment for committing a crime in the city, and the guard will more commonly resort to exile and repossession of property, unpayable fines that result in being forced into long periods of indentured servitude, or unofficial execution to deal with serious criminals. But some lawbreakers are worth more alive than dead, and for them, the Hive has hands-down the most secure cells in Spire, and perhaps the known world.

Kept here, often indefinitely, are political or religious prisoners who are too well-loved to risk martyring them to a cause (the previous three leaders of the Crimson Vigil are said to be inside, and plotting an escape); valued warriors who cannot be controlled when among the populace of Spire; weird genetic aberants who are of particular interest to the universities of natural science up-Spire; gnolls, wanted for questioning on the wars to the south; and no end of "experiments" or "pets" (owned by high-ranking aelfir who cannot house these strange and powerful individuals within their own domain), known collectively as the Menagerie.

(The cells themselves are rigged to detach and fall away from the main building should the guard wish it, dropping the inhabitant into the depths of Spire along with the walls of their prison, and crushing them utterly.)

Most interestingly, the Hive has also given rise to some of the most advanced practical psychology in the city in an attempt to understand the minds of those imprisoned there – from a crimefighting perspective, in the case of the guard, and from a purely aesthetic fascination in the case of the aelfir poet-interrogators that visit their muses and gain artistic inspiration from their cracked minds.

THE ALLIED DEFENCE HQ

At the base of the Spire, on the east between the North Docks and the Blue Port, is the Allied Defence HQ – or the Barracks, as it is commonly known – where the aelfir are staging their ongoing war against the gnolls in the southlands of Far Nujab.

It is a bustling hub of activity, swarming with soldiers and hangers-on – traders, dancers, weapon merchants, children, cooks, and sex workers – that increases in security the closer one gets to the centre. Here, a hospital staffed with Lajhan priestesses with arms bloody to the elbows takes in the walking wounded from border skirmishes; there, a priest of Brother Harvest leads a group of soldiers in prayer before they march out of the great eastern gate; an aelfir Warrior-Poet stands atop the structure of the Spire and leads a unit of elite high elves in sword-drills and song recitals; skywhales, docked outside the city and manned by bare-footed wind priests, take on troops flown up by scarred megacorvidae; human Jaeger mercenaries, rich from war, spoil their lovers with wine and song.

GENERAL SNOW-ON-STONE

The army – referred to in general as the allied defence force, although they haven't defended anything sizeable in a century – is commanded by General Snow-on-Stone, a giant of an aelfir. Snow-on-Stone has bucked tradition by not pairing their military leadership with appropriate levels of artistic mastery, opting instead to travel abroad in their youth and learn from the Wanderer-Kings of the humans, the High Sorcerers of the gnolls, the Lords of the Crimson Vigil of the drow, and many other civilisations besides.

(No-one is quite sure how long Snow-on-Stone has been alive, or indeed whether they are still alive or have opted to undergo undying surgery. Their warded platemail, which they are never seen out of when in public, defies all scrying attempts. Maybe there is more than one general. Maybe it is a beautiful machine, a clockwork elf crafted with all-but-forgotten smithing skills in the frozen wastes to the far north.

Maybe, some whisper, it is a human under the mask – or a drow.)

The General, then, is in possession of the broadest military knowledge in the known world, and coupled with their famous stoic pragmatism, they have led the armies of Spire to victory across the scattered gnoll tribes to the south. Standing at the head of their army in their trademark angular stone mask, clutching two exquisite shot-cannon of human make in their gauntleted fists, the General is an imposing sight to behold – especially when flanked by their honour-guard, a cadre of highly-skilled aelfir soldiers, all of whom share the General's no-nonsense attitude.

The General has set their mind upon taking the gnoll capital city. They believe it is only a matter of time until this happens.

THE ENLISTED

The drow make up the majority of the allied defence force, and most present in the army are either conscripted as part of their durance (and thus called Enlisted) or, having finished their time as an indentured servant, are unable to find decent work elsewhere and choose to stay on in the army.

Drow skin is very sensitive to sunlight, and the majority of the battles that these drow see are in the hot, dry mountains to the south, so they tend to wear layers of loose, skin-covering cloth that protect them from the sun and also conceal them among the rocks and dirt of the land in which they fight.

While most drow start off their lives as soldiers with very little military training, those that survive the early battles quickly become capable fighters – useful for the period of their durance, but a serious problem when they are demobbed and left to roam the city under their own steam. The enforcers of Red Row (and the legbreakers of the Silver Quarter) are almost all ex-military, and more than a match for all but the most hardened town guard. The Ministry is understandably keen to leverage this problem against the aelfir, but finds that many of the ex-soldiers lack the capacity for subterfuge needed to survive as an underground revolutionary. Those that do are afforded every assistance in an effort to bring them on-side.

For more details on advances granted by joining the Enlisted, see page 70.

SKALD UNITS

Before an aelfir becomes a Warrior-Poet – if they ever reach that exalted honour – they join the skalds. An unpredictable mix of writers, murderers, artists, drunks, glimmer-addicts and berserkers, the skalds fight with whatever weapons they desire, wearing whatever armour they feel like, and if it weren't for the fact that they are all skilled combatants they'd wind up dead within seconds of battle starting in earnest.

Riding into battle on chariots pulled by horses (highly-trained and restrained horses, as animals tend to distrust elves) or leaping from the back of low-flying skywhales, the skalds descend on the battle like a storm. They carry the best weapons they can afford (unless they feel like roughing it with a standard-issue sword) and are backed up by a broad array of protective rites, weird occultism and hit-and-run tactics that leave the enemy reeling.

There are tales of the skald being caught out in the open and torn asunder by enemy fire, but there are far more tales of them closing on entrenched enemy positions, whooping and singing, and carving apart the opposition as though they were pigs; of mystery cults devoted to Father Summer knitting wounds back together, faster than the eye can see; of swords flashing with white-hot light, burning enemies to ash; and of luckless gnolls tearing out their own eyes and stumbling, broken and bloody, through the battle, because they bore witness to the unfettered beauty of the skald and could no longer bear to look upon anything else.

SPECIAL TACTICS CORPS

As most of the enlisted would know them, the special tactics corps are a small, tight-knit collection of elite troops carrying exotic weapons (elven song-bows with arrows that pluck the last breath out of the victim's chest like a flute; gnoll arcanotech devices that evaporate moisture at an explosive rate; unstable galvanic weaponry from Gywnn-Enforr that launches bundles of metal rods that can punch clean through a building) backed up by a conclave of wild-eyed magicians and specialists.

Their missions are never discussed with the rank-and-file troops, but of course there are rumours that they assassinate enemy commanders, blow up supply depots, hijack skywhales, and so on. These rumours are, for the most part, true. The Special Tactics Corps recruits the brightest and best soldiers available to carry out its bloody work.

But: the corps are magicians, dabbling in the dark arts of the occult – and demonology, in particular. Forbidden within the grounds of Spire (and indeed, officially forbidden in war following the Accord of Serpent's Tooth), this nightmare sorcery is winning the aelfir wars throughout the south.

Using a network of conduits – agents implanted without their knowledge with resonant lodestones that conduct demonic magic, or who have had the demon-song whispered into their heads by specially-trained Warrior-Poets – the magicians of the corps will start to weave their magic, muttering incantations in long-dead languages, bringing the World Beyond to a seething, festering, swollen boil against their reality. Seeing that demonology almost always kills the caster, these conduits are used as proxies to channel the spell – and they are hidden within other units, or as spies, or even within the ranks of the gnolls themselves if the corps are lucky enough to capture a suitable subject alive.

When the time is right, the caster pushes against the now paper-thin skin between worlds, and the conduit in question erupts in a conflagration of unreality that leaves no-one untouched; those unlucky enough to survive the experience are invariably mad, unable to process even the most basic stimuli, their minds utterly blasted away by the force of the spell.

Depending on the scale of the engagement, the power of the spell and the availability of suitable conduits, the aelfir can plunge an entire town into the maddening realm of demons, leaving no survivors but the buildings and resources intact. It is only a matter of time before they have the resources and skill enough to take on a city.

THE COUNCIL

The Council rules Spire. Operating as an arm of the High Elf nation with very little oversight, these seven people are the final arbiters of all decisions in the city, and can vote on any matter that they cannot come to instant agreement upon.

They come to these decisions once a fortnight in one of the best-defended rooms in the city, a chamber deep within the original bone-rock of Spire, flanked by legions of black-armoured guards. The Council Chamber is remarkably austere, covered in more wards than the lair of the most paranoid undercity blood-witch, and carved from stark white stone that grows and changes with a mind of its own year-on-year.

The Council, according to the city laws, must always number seven (and no more than seven), with dead or retired members being replaced through general agreement of the remaining members.

They are, at present:

ARCHDEACON MANY-THE-SEEDLINGS, who is a devout worshipper of the Solar Pantheon, and holds an important position within the church (though he rarely lowers himself to deliver sermons outside of small, aelfir-only congregations). He makes no secret of his devotion to the cult, but he does conceal his blood-oaths to the cult of Brother Harvest, and his zealous opinions on ethnic cleansing – even within his own race. He is unspeakably beautiful (and wears a mask that shows much of his face to emphasise this, in a flagrant breach of tradition), and it is rumoured that he maintains his looks through the dark rites of Sister Spring.

COUNCILMAN DRYNN, the only human member of the council, who is (secretly) the chief communications node for the prokatakos implant cult known collectively as The Intelligence. The spy network under his control stretches throughout Spire and into the human lands beyond, and he has been known to be viciously pro-aelfir when the chips are down. Drynn is famously well-informed, presumably due to the fist-sized lump of aetherically-resonant crystal implanted secretly in his brain, but it seems that of late he has been resorting to drowning it out with strong drink.

LORD ERRIN JUBILANT-THE-DEVOTED, an aelfir from a proud, noble (and tremendously rich) lineage who has been dead for twenty years following successful undying surgery on his 75th birthday. Despite his pretence at being a good and pious citizen (right down to wearing a full-face mask, as is the proper way), his walking corpse was infested by the blood-song parasite known as the Vyskant, and he has spent the last decade quietly arranging things to prepare for a full interdimensional invasion that will see Spire turned into a glorious flesh-mother that heralds the arrival of the Vyskant race.

MADAME FEY-ARANYEN is the only drow member of the council, a token gesture to the dark elves to give the impression that they have some say in the governance of the city. She is a midwife of some prowess, but years in chamber meetings have left her skills rusty, and she is almost entirely controlled by the other ruling members. She cannot act openly in the support of the drow past meaningless, empty gestures.

LADY GRENDELMYN STARS-SOFTLY-SHINE is a devotee of The Spire Ascendant, a semi-secret cult that believe that the Spire is a divine entity that must be awakened through ancient rites. She is a fair and just ruler, as far as aelfir go (which is to say not especially fair or just), but she is prepared to sacrifice anything and anyone to see the city arisen as a god.

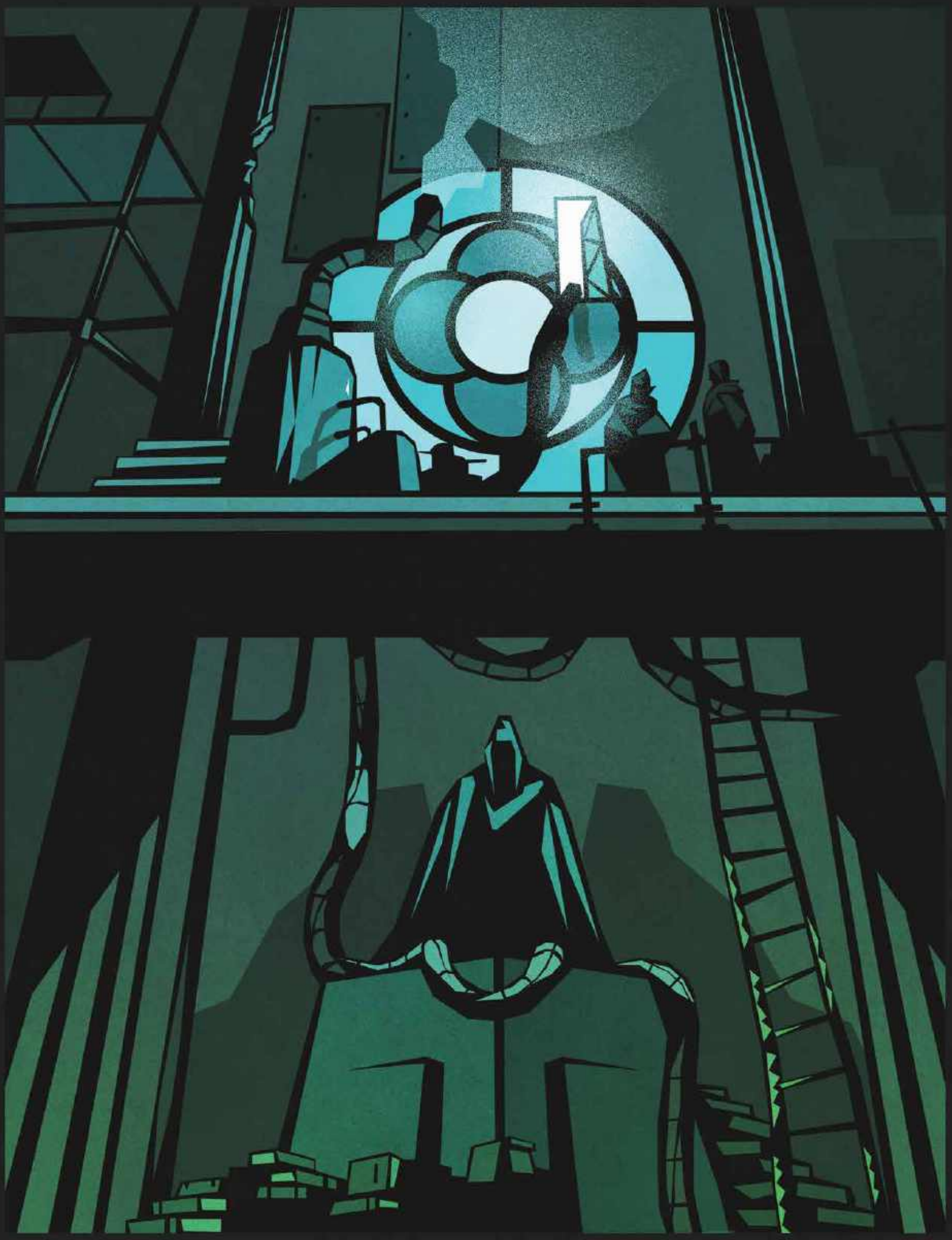
LORD VEQ LIGHT-THROUGH-SPLINTERED-GLASS, also an undying like Jubilant-the-Devoted, is an old-school businessman who ensured his election to the council through an interconnected web of allegiances, favours and blackmail. He has huge business interests in the undercity, most notably Red Row but also Hemlock Fruit Market, and is obsessed with keeping the organised crime in Spire under his control. Veq has a habit of signing his lieutenants up for undying surgery against their will, and his chambers are lined with the hearts of his underlings ready to be destroyed at the first sign of insubordination.

CAPTAIN WANDER-THE-LOST is a Warrior-Poet, one of the highest ranks an aelfir can attain in their peculiar military and artistic societal structure. Despite (or perhaps because of) their many achievements in the field of warfare and poetry, they have fallen into an ennui, and so to counteract this they have become hopelessly addicted to blue – a human-made drug that allows the normally cruel and thoughtless high elves to feel sadness. While this has improved their work no end, they are prone to fits of deep depression, and it is rumoured that they only appear in public through a network of body-doubles.

THE ORIGINAL SPIRE

The Spire grows. It heals over carvings, it extends further towards the sky, it opens and closes new passages. These are slow – geographically so, barely noticeable in a lifetime – and could easily be written off as the building settling, or reacting to underground tectonic shifts, but: it is growing. If it's alive, it naturally follows that it must be using something as fuel to grow, but no-one can work out what that is. People, maybe? Blood, spilled hot on the bone-white tiles that grow out of the original floors? Sunlight, as though it were a great stone tree?

Also: spireblack, the sticky ichor that collects around the Works, is found nowhere else in the known world, and it seems to collect out of thin air where smoke and industry are found. Perhaps the Spire breathes, and spireblack is something akin to phlegm or catarrh; the more that the Works expand, and they do so every year, the richer the flammable harvest is for the gutterkin that scrape the spireblack off the walls.



DISTRICTS AND FACTIONS OF RELIGION

THE CATHEDRAL OF OUR GLORIOUS LADY

Properly worshipped – as she is in most drow territories – the moon goddess is a being of three parts referred to as Damnou. The facets that make up her entirety are Limyé, the light, Lombre, the dark, and Lekolé, the shadow, or blood-moon. These three deities encompass what are commonly known as the six dark elf virtues, and it is by these tenets that many dark elves live their lives and form the basis for their morality.

Yet worship of Damnou is forbidden in Spire under orders from the ruling aelfir, and drow are permitted only to pay their respects to Limyé, Our Glorious Lady, the light side of the moon, who espouses the virtues of Tenacity and Community. To worship the other two facets is to take on a death sentence – and so, the old temples to Lombre and Lekolé long cast down, the crumbling and vast cathedral of Our Glorious Lady forms the heart of the dark elf nation in Spire.

THE CATHEDRAL

The cathedral itself spans many city blocks, and there is no clear beginning or end to the structure; where once it stood proud in the centre of a grand square lit by burning braziers, generations of rebuilding and repurposing have blurred the edges of the structure. Dormitories bleed into storage rooms, egg-hatcheries colonise naves, and poor-house soup kitchens steam away beneath the faded majesty of cracked stained glass windows.

THE SIX DARK ELF VIRTUES

Damnou is the most prominent of the dark elf deities, and it is rare to find a community of drow that do not pay at least lip service to her – even the bestial followers of Charnel in their haunted necropoli, far from the home nations of Ys and indeed at war with the Duchy of Aliquam, maintain shrines to her alongside their rough-hewn altars of cracked and gnawed bones. While she is worshipped in many different ways, most forms of belief skew towards the six virtues of the dark elves that they believe, if embodied, allow for a good and pious life.

- **TENACITY.** Endure, even when events and your enemies conspire against you.
- **COMMUNITY.** Help others who need it, and welcome them into your home.
- **GRACE.** Act with precision and reveal only what you choose to reveal.
- **VIGILANCE.** Maintain awareness and keep informed.
- **SAGACITY.** Learn from the lessons of those who have come before, but come to your own conclusions.
- **FURY.** When you commit to bloodshed, do so utterly and without fear.

In the depths of the temple, on creaking floorboards and under dripping ceilings, is one of the most thorough histories of the dark elves outside of the Home Nations or Aliquam – reams and reams of paper detailing family lineage, tapestries of glories and tragedies, and maps of the lands of the great rulers of the Home Nations painted with painstaking detail on crumbling plaster. The dark elves are a people under threat, and the followers of Limyé believe that is it through togetherness and remembrance that they will endure.

Ceremonies and sermons are run on an ad-hoc basis whenever enough priests and/or congregation are in the same place, but the majority of observances to Our Glorious Lady are done through good works – feeding the poor, defending the defenceless, and protecting the drow of Spire. Having clothes that are too fine (or, in some sects, owning more than one set of clothes) is seen as wasteful when so many drow are going hungry. Many priests compete to live the more sparse existence possible, favouring simple tin and wooden jewelry, rough woven robes, and inking their holy texts onto their skin so as to never worry about losing them.

THE MAINTAINERS

Keeping the cathedral intact has not been easy, especially with the aelfir attempting to let the church quietly die from unpopularity so it can be completely replaced by the solar pantheon of their homelands – and the church simply doesn't have the resources to fund a proper restoration. Instead, gangs of priests and congregation under the name of Maintainers liberate building material from construction sites, warehouses and (if needs be) existing structures, moving quickly and quietly while others sleep, clearing out vast stores of bricks and cement overnight.

Any structure not bearing the iconic spiders of the church of Limyé can be quickly disassembled and refitted deeper in the grounds of the cathedral: the current offices of the Maji-Lalin, overseer of the temple, are made up of the remains of a theatre that dared to open on the borders; the beds in the L'od Nansan's hospital are repurposed from an Ivory Row boarding house; the reinforced tunnels that run between the inner sanctums of the church are Vermissian train cars, ripped apart and rebuilt, stripped down to the bare metal.

Nearby builders' merchants have upped their security in response to the thefts, so they and the church have entered something of an arms race.

HALLOWS

The church of Limyé encourages the veneration of hallows, or saints – mortal individuals who have embodied the virtues of Our Glorious Lady, often leading to their untimely death at the hands of authorities. Given the anti-authoritarian nature of some hallows, the official aelfir stance is to forbid their worship and dismantle any hallow-shrines they find, but the followers of Limyé keep building them regardless – hiding them away in cupboards, under floorboards, in attics and behind furniture.

AGAINST THE MINISTRY

There is a growing movement within the cathedral that reckons the Ministry is doing more harm than good by resisting the rule of the aelfir. Perhaps, they figure, it is better to go along with the rule of the high elves and enter their society, with an eye to one day be viewed as equals.

The Ministry view this as cowardice at best and heresy at worst; but it is a popular viewpoint, especially amongst the poorer, more vulnerable members of the congregation who are more concerned about where their next meal is coming from than the glorious resurgence of the dark elf race in their lost capital city. It's not uncommon for those among the church, rather than hiding Ministry members away from the authorities, to out them as villains and terrorists who would endanger the future of what little community the drow have remaining.

THE MINISTRY OF OUR HIDDEN MISTRESS

The drow will not continue to be humiliated by the aelfir; they will plot, and scheme, and subvert the will of the aelfir until they are once more the rulers of Spire. This is the dictum of the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress. Worshipping the forbidden goddess Lombre, the dark side of the moon, they have formed a wide-reaching secret society devoted to ridding Spire of the cruel aelfir once and for all. They have secreted themselves deep beneath the crumbling stonework of the Cathedral of Our Glorious Lady, and hold strange, dark ceremonies in forgotten basements and mouldering crypts. Each level of initiation

NOTABLE HALLOWS OF OUR GLORIOUS LADY

All of the below advances are Medium advances, and available to the Lajhan class or any character who otherwise devotes their life in service to Limyé and her chosen saints.

Hallow Hearts-Breath-Halting: unusually, this prominent hallow was an aelfir who devoted her life's work to maintaining the worship of the traditional dark elf religion in Spire. It is through her efforts (and fortune) that the cathedral still exists at all, and the anniversary of her death – she was burned on a pyre atop New Heaven after standing trial for sedition and heresy – is a day of mourning for the faithful of Limyé.

THE BLESSING OF HEARTS-BREATH-HALTING: Mark D3 stress and spend ten minutes praying at a shrine to Hearts-Breath-Halting. When you act against an enemy of your religion for the next day, roll with mastery.

Hallow Dee: a drow folk hero from long ago who carried a devout and injured captain to the Shrine at Bachoux in shadowed Aliquam to deliver a speech which saved the nation from defeat at the hands of the aelfir. Veneration of Dee is forbidden, and involves going for long periods of time without rest or food as tribute to her sacrifice.

THE BLESSING OF DEE: Once per day, as long as you have not eaten or taken comfort that day, clear all marked stress in Blood.

Hallow Ambra: a scribe who wrote The Deyès-Liv, the core religious text for Damnou worshipers; one third of the book remains in the Cathedral, the other two are lost. Worship of Ambra is performed through ritual calligraphy, making sanctified copies of what remains of the Deyès-Liv.

THE BLESSING OF AMBRA: Upon waking, mark 1 stress to Silver and craft a page of beautiful text copied from the Deyès-Liv as the sun rises. This page of text can be used as a (D8, Ranged, One-shot) weapon against creatures possessed by dark spirits or filled with unholy power.

Hallow Merik: a slave, serving under one of the wicked rulers of the city-states of Ys, who dared to strike back at her masters and after years of abuse, and who returned to life no fewer than four times to continue supporting her community and acting as an inspiration to her fellow slaves.

THE BLESSING OF MERIK: Mark D3 stress to Mind and pray before an altar to Merik. If you would die before the next sunrise, you do not die, and instead cling to life and endure through your injuries.

in the Ministry brings with it fresh revelations and terrible, terrible burdens.

Ministers, as the members of this sect are known, are recruited into cells by their superiors through a long observation and an increasingly difficult, and dangerous, series of trials. No-one joins the Ministry without giving something up to do so, often at the behest of their masters within the organisation – the cell leaders in the Ministry must have absolute faith in their charges, and trust that they will act for the good of the organisation if not for themselves, even under immense pressure.

Ministers, or at least those who have lived long enough to get a few years' experience under their belt, face their duty with a grim determination. Theirs is not a glorious fight, and many of their friends and associates would gladly sell them out to the aelfir for the promise of coin, a place to live, or better job prospects. By their very existence they endanger the lives of everyone around them, and it is hard to find a drow who has not suffered some of the brutal reprisals that the aelfir visit on any ministers, or their associates, once their true motivations are uncovered.

But they have made the sacrifice of their own lives, and perhaps the lives of their friends, to hopefully secure the future of a drow-led Spire – not through military might or sanctions, as they once did, back before their race was fractured and crumbling at the seams, but through subterfuge, grace, subversion and misinformation.

A dark moon rises, and with it, the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress; and the aelfir should pray to all the gods that they hold dear for forgiveness, for they will find none at the hand the drow.

For more details on advances granted by worship of Our Hidden Mistress, see page 73. It is assumed that all characters in a standard game of Spire will have access to these advances as they have devoted their lives to service of the Ministry.

CELL STRUCTURE

In an effort to contain breaches of security, especially given the skilled torturers of the high elves, the drow have built the Ministry as a series of cells that may not be aware of one another. Each cell reports to a magister, who will be in charge of anything up to five or six active cells (and double that number of sleeper agents or potential recruits) operating in adjacent districts. The magister will, in turn, report to their superiors, who will report to theirs, sending information spiralling away within a series of ever-tightening circles of security. Magisters do not like to receive bad news, and will often refuse to give their charges means of contacting them outside of regular reports in safe territory lest they lead their enemies straight to them.

If a minister – for that is what the field agents of the Ministry are called by the populace – shows particular skill, they will be approached and offered a chance to become a magister themselves, a role that again comes with a series of punishing tests and sacrifices. If successful they will recruit others as they were once recruited and spread the influence of the drow throughout Spire.

Cells are not offered much support from their masters, save information and leads to follow up on; equipment and resources are hard to come by, and it is generally assumed that, whoever placed the request, someone more important further up the grapevine needs it more than they do. Operatives are encouraged to source materials using their initiative, and may be asked to operate for months or even years at a time without direct contact from a superior.

It is not entirely clear who is in charge of the Ministry, but there are rumours: a turncoat aelfir, who has set the whole thing up to strike at their enemies; a cadre of ever-changing and shifting masters, a dark contrast to the Council that rules Spire; an undying drow, the fallen king of Destera, trying to reestablish his lost empire from centuries past; or Lombre herself, clad in a thousand faces, guiding the drow to a new and wonderful future.

RECRUITMENT

The first requirement to joining the Ministry is simply to know that it exists. With the aelfir suppressing worship of Lombre and branding any ministers it finds as "traitors", "heretics", or "betrayers" while avoiding any mention of the secret society itself, many drow – especially those new to the city, or from slightly more comfortable walks of life than standard – have never heard of the Ministry, or think it a series of fairy stories peddled by idealistic idiots.

GRACE

The virtue of grace is a fundamental aspect of dark elf society and morality. Aside from the veneration of physical and social precision, the broader concept of grace is one of presenting only what you want others to see, and acting in accordance with a variety of difficult codes of etiquette. Lying, as humans know it, can be seen as a good thing – extending the conceit of the "white lie", the harmless falsehood that smoothes over complications, to whole relationships and facets of one's personality. Truth is a fragmentary and disparate thing, impossible to strictly define, and is instead replaced with a web of conflicting viewpoints that a virtuous drow can maintain effortlessly. This, more than anything else, is the purest form of grace.

It is grace that is espoused by Our Hidden Mistress, or Lombre, who manifests in the world as the dark side of the moon that hangs in the night sky. When she is represented in art or visits her worshipers in dreams, she is a slender-limbed drow who bears many faces, each different, that shift around her shadowy cloak; she speaks with perfect precision and forethought, never a word wasted, and she is impossible to trick or corrupt.

Even then, there's no front door to knock on, no regional representative in a cushy office to have a chat with – and the Ministry, preferring its agents to be self-reliant and take the initiative, waits for someone to track them down rather than actively sending out feelers to recruit agents.

The way it normally plays out is this: the potential recruit, a curious soul, will begin to notice strange things around them – secret handshakes, shady glances, supplies or people going missing – and they will pry into the situation, often at great risk to themselves or their associates. The sad truth is that most potential recruits are caught up in the chaos that follows the actions of the Ministry, and end up arrested or dead or both, one after the other; that, or they report the ministers to the authorities themselves, and must be silenced before they spread too much information.

But a handful are good enough to survive the initial recruitment, have the right intentions at heart, make contact with the Ministry, and earn the attentions of a magister who will begin the second stage of initiation which will make many of them wish they had never started poking around the world of shadows in the first place.

INITIATION

Just as there are six virtues regarded as holy by the drow of Spire, there are six challenges set before each new recruit. These vary by magister, and are in no way official, but most initiation rites are at least broadly similar to those outlined here.

THE RITE OF TENACITY: The initiate is taken deep beneath the temple of Our Hidden Mistress, itself beneath the Cathedral of Our Glorious Lady, and must survive three days without supplies or aid in the labyrinthine catacombs that hang heavy with the stench of death and old bones.

What thought kept you alive, down amid the dead?

THE RITE OF FURY: The initiate is told to act as their blood decides, and to exact vengeance for wrongs against them with violence; to spread fear of the drow, and show their unjust masters that the Blood Moon still shines. Many magisters supplant this rite with a cocktail of mind-altering drugs, such as the notoriously grimy stimulant known as dagger, to encourage the initiate to act in accordance with their true emotions, leading to one brutal night of retribution that may – entirely coincidentally – see the subject cut off from their previous life.

Who did you hurt when you demonstrated your fury?

THE RITE OF GRACE: The initiate is provided the name and location of a target who they must study over time and, eventually, become. While the magister will generally select a target who at least bears passing resemblance to the initiate, the matter of their close friends and family must be accounted for, and so begins a protracted period of subterfuge that ends with the target ostracised by their community, allowing the initiate to supplant them utterly. (And, of course, the target themselves must be dealt with: many initiates balk at the idea of killing an innocent, and so kind magisters will select a target who they feel is worthy of death.)

Whose life did you steal?

THE RITE OF VIGILANCE: The initiate will be instructed to meet a magister – never their own – deep in the crushing din of the Works. Here they will be administered a draught that will knock them unconscious and told, once they awaken, to track down the magister before the next sunrise. The sheer volume of people moving through the Works is enough to throw off most tracking attempts, and deft magisters will spread false information around to keep initiates off their balance.

What mistake did the magister make that helped you track them?

THE RITE OF COMMUNITY: The initiate is told to approach a group of drow with which they share a bitter enmity and to help them selflessly for a full lunar month. This can be in any form the initiate desires, so long as there is visible evidence of the assistance – while some approach openly and beg for forgiveness, others operate as shadowy benefactors who hunt down and punish wrongdoers or donate money and resources to their once-enemies. (If the initiate in question does not have a bitter enmity, one will be provided.)

Who did you help?

THE RITE OF SAGACITY: The initiate is handed over to an agent of the Ministry who specialises in the stranger elements of the city and the drow race

HIERARCHY IN THE MINISTRY OF OUR HIDDEN MISTRESS

These are the ranks of the Ministry, in order from low to high:

Neonate: Not a full member – one who is undergoing trials before their full initiation.

Dormant: A retired or inactive member who is not currently serving in a cell. Older ministers are often demoted to dormant status, but can be reactivated at any time.

Minister: A member who operates actively in a cell, receiving orders from above but generally acting on their own initiative.

Magister: In charge of overseeing a number of cells and co-ordinating actions as best they can. Often, they will only meet their charges during briefing and debriefing, and few like being contacted.

Exarch: A high-ranking operative in charge of several magisters. Each exarch has a hereditary title that replaces their true name when they take on the position.

Oracle: A speaker for the weavers, wreathed in incense and dark magic, tenuously connected to reality.

Weaver: Those who weave the webs of fate and create the revolution. There are only ever three weavers, and they are likely no longer mortal.

The Mistress: No-one but the weavers meet the Mistress, and they have never said who she is.

– a spider-blooded matriach midwife, a dimension-shearing Vermissian sage, one of the zoetrope horrors bearing sickness from the Heart known as blood-witches, deep apiarists who whisper prayers of protection to sacred swarms of sightless bees, and so on – and told to study under them for a lunar month. The Ministry ensures that the initiate's eyes are opened to the realities of Spire, and few survive with their sanity and stability fully intact.

Who did you study under, and what did you learn?

THE SECT OF OUR CRIMSON VIGIL

The blood moon, or hunter's moon, hangs in the sky once each month and casts a dull, crimson light over the world. It is this facet of the moon that the dark elves call Lekolé, or Our Lady of Vengeance, and her form is a terrible thing to behold: she is a many-armed, towering spectre of destruction, a fire-eyed wraith the colour of blood, and she preaches purity through annihilation.

There is no sin too grievous for her followers (commonly known as vigilites or crimsons) to commit in service of her glory: they will kill hatchlings and children without a second thought; they will put buildings or whole city blocks to the torch; they will damn a hundred drow to painful deaths to hunt down and kill one aelfir who they view as an enemy of the people. Or: that's what the papers say, at least.

(It was not always this way, and indeed it is still not this way in Aliquam, and Ys, and the other nations of the drow where Damnou is worshipped. In her proper form as a trinity, the Lady of Vengeance is tempered by the kindness of the Glorious Lady and the grace of the Hidden Mistress. But in Spire, since worship of her has been driven underground, the sect has splintered and devolved into violent extremism.)

They secret themselves within resistance organisations and act as firebrands and saboteurs, pushing the subtle efforts of the Ministry (and several other revolutionary cadres, such as the Worker's Rights Party, the Drow Liberation Front, and several houses of the Midwives) ever closer to open warfare. They maintain cells of operatives, too, like the Ministry but even more decentralised, and more than once in recent memory the two organisations have come to blows over the correct way to handle a situation.

But for the crimsons, it's not about winning the war – it's about fighting the battle. Each hurled firebomb is a prayer; each extinguished sorcerer a grand sacrifice; each pull of the trigger an act of worship. Every year, more and more angry young drow join the cult, and it is only a matter of time before the aelfir campaign against them shifts from propaganda and show trials to focused, all-out extermination.

For more details on joining the Crimson Vigil and the advances that such an act provides, see page 75.

Membership in the Vigil is fairly common in the Ministry, although most vigilites will keep it a secret.

NOTEWORTHY DIVISIONS OF THE CRIMSON VIGIL

The Vigil operates in a decentralised cell-structure, with many cells being made up of a single member hidden as part of a larger organisation, but there are several off-shoots and movements within the cult that bear mentioning:

There are the Drowners of Godstreet Station, hiding deep in the Vermissian, who propose that all occult magic is heresy against their goddess and extinguish the lives of practitioners in the flooded depths of the candle-strewn ticket office. Almost directly opposed to them are the nameless sect who seek to subvert and control the aelfir's demonological implant technology to unleash a nightmarish storm of unreality upon Spire, and adjacent to those are the Resurectionists who believe that the only true path to salvation is to destroy Spire through the detonation of hundreds, if not thousands, of shaped charges placed on the foundations. The sect of St Hypakis, who is it said walked amidst great battles untouched by a single arrow or blade, preach conversion and blackmail as a tool to extend their influence into the upper reaches of Spire. The True Order of Blood, a perversion of the sect of Our Glorious Lady, operates a paramilitary resistance force throughout Derelictus and the Works and specialises in executions of authority figures and guard patrols with their trademark cut-down rifles.

There is no end to the splinter groups within the broader organisation of the Crimson Vigil, and the true horror is that many of them will be made up of people who you know, live with, are married to, and so on. They have infiltrated every aspect and level of drow society, and though their aims are not dissimilar from those of the Ministry, their means are far, far different.

VIGILITES

Names: Corvy, Huxton, Wesyll

Descriptors: Wearing a scarlet hooded robe, Clad in the sacred red ropes of the Bound, Shirtless and covered in devotional tattoos

Difficulty: The Crimson Vigil doesn't attract the most skilled warriors – difficulty 0, unless you're trying to break their resolve, which is difficulty 1

Resistance: 3 if you catch them unawares, 5 if they're on the warpath

Equipment: Firebombs (D6, Spread D3, One-shot), clubs and knives (D3)

VIGILITE FIREBRAND

Names: Lux Meridian, Ignacius, Matchlock

Descriptors: Carrying devotional literature, Has set part of themselves on fire, Wears their manacles as penance

Difficulty: For all their bluster, firebrands aren't any more skilled than those that follow them; difficulty 0 or 2 if you try to get them to change their mind or back down, though

Resistance: 6

Special: For each vigilite nearby, increase their Resistance by 1

Equipment: Red-painted jury-rigged shotgun (D6, Ranged, Point-blank, Reload, Dangerous), serious-looking knife (D3, Brutal)

PILGRIM'S WALK

Here, the gods sit ten deep and five high. Pilgrim's Walk is open to all who make it inside the city, past greedy customs officers and hungry bandits. It offers a welcoming embrace to those of all faiths then immediately attempts to take them for everything they've got.

Twisting, leaking, dripping passages house a thousand temples and fifty thousand poor folk wedged into tiny living spaces between them. The corridors here, often far from the exterior wall of Spire and therefore any natural light, are kept dark aside from the glow of altar candles and sputtering spire-black braziers carried around by hired torchboys, their arms and faces scarred from a short lifetime of burns.

In the darkness, workshops and poor-houses turn out low-quality goods, paying their workers little more than a starvation diet and offering them a patch of floor to sleep on. Wallets, clothing, devotional charms, "holy" water and images of saints flow out of Pilgrim's Walk and into Spire, along with reams of sacred texts and evangelical pamphlets on tissue-thin paper that spread the word of their gods far and wide.

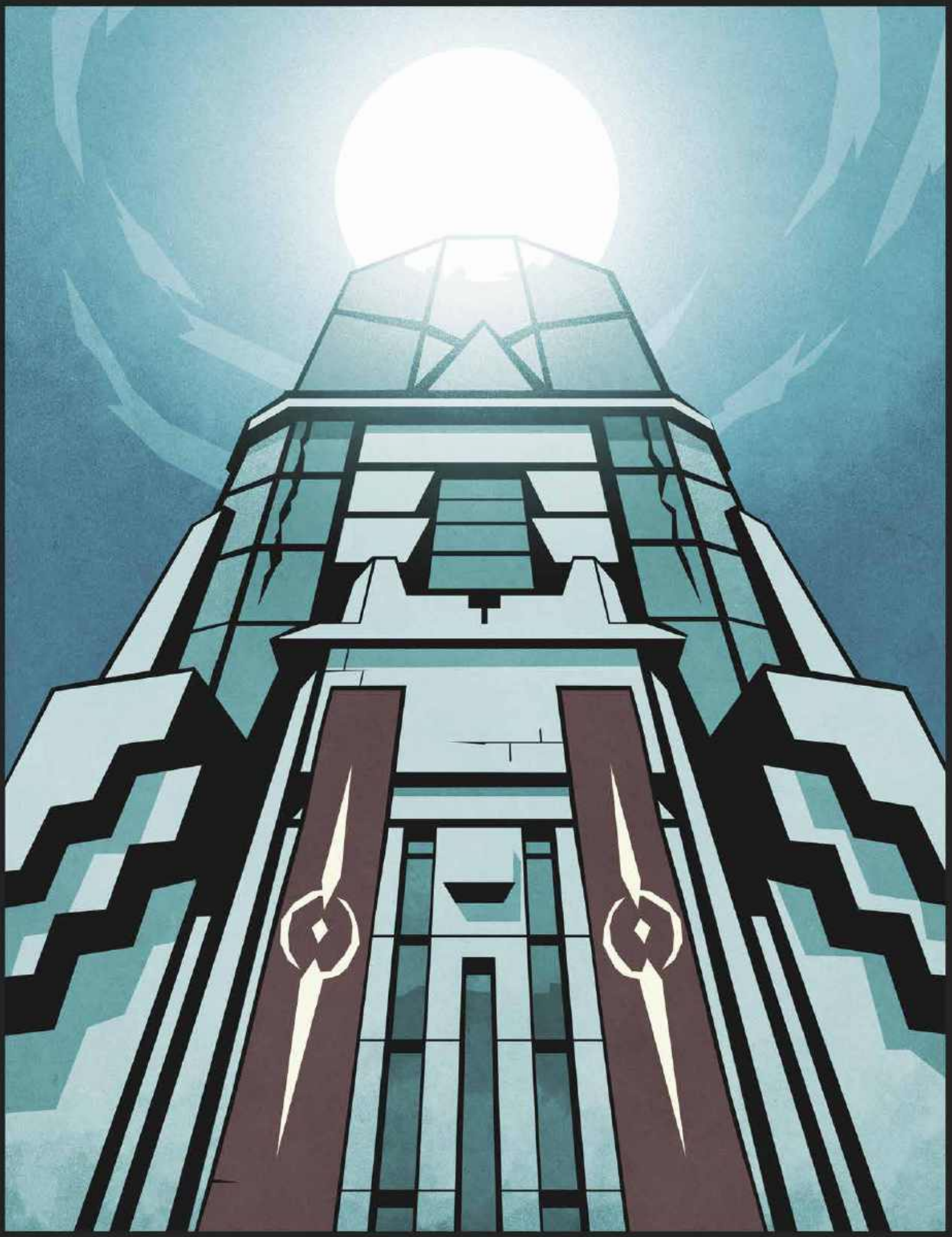
And – far away from the lights of the mainstreet, deep in the wet and shadowed heart of Pilgrim's Walk, cults and opportunists strike out at the humans that live there and steal their blood, their organs, and their bodies, selling them on to the highest bidder, or consuming them in black rituals to old and all-but-forgotten gods.

WARFARE

Pilgrim's Walk is an unstable location, and not just structurally – the faiths inside the rickety walls of the district coexist in a confusing and undocumentable web of alliances, enmities, border disputes and imagined slights, and so leadership and territory shift between factions on a daily basis. Control of a church (and more importantly, of the meagre purses of its congregation) is fiercely defended, and on more than one occasion worshippers of a particular faith have shuffled into the temple for their morning devotions to find that their usual high priest has been replaced with an entirely different person preaching an entirely different religion, or cobbling together a new one to try and keep everyone happy.

The aelfir – and, by extension, the guard – are none too happy about this state of affairs, and have ordered the deployment of a fearsome police presence to monitor and suppress riot and insurrection within Pilgrim's Walk. The guard themselves don't relish the thought of venturing into the dark and deadly corridors of the side-streets, and so the faithful and the officers of the law can often be seen clashing in open conflict before one side flees (either to the safety of the guard house or anonymity of the backstreets) and prepares to exact retribution on the other.

It is a matter of time, the guards say, before the orders come through to clean out Pilgrim's Walk once and for all. But until they get the order – and the



backup to support it – the law and the populace of the district exist in a tense stalemate.

THE STREET OF GODS

The street of gods, or godstreet – a three-storey opening that stretches snakelike through the district – is home to the most successful (or the most enthusiastic) churches, and a traveller walking down it can expect to be harassed and harangued with many offers of eternal salvation and absolution from their sins at competitive prices. (So competitive, in fact, that often membership in a temple is free – but then the worshipper should take care to work out if they're the customer or the product in this transaction.)

But: for all the grime and abuse, Pilgrim's Walk is a place of hope. Any faith (aside from the nine forbidden creeds, as denoted by the council) can find a place here and prosper if they can recruit enough followers and hang onto them.

What's more, godstreet houses more relics than any other part of the city – at least, if you took all the peddlars at their word. Between the bellowing priests and comely priestesses with worship-hither eyes, hawkers trailing groups of torchboys gesture for travellers to come down the side alleys and see their wares. Holy water and sacred symbols are easy to come by and hard to authenticate, but push further back into the darkness and you'll find the burial shrouds of saints, the fingerbones of fallen gods, pickled demon tentacles, ceremonial aelfir blood-antlers, jarred spirits and bottled djinn from Far Nujab. Of course, most of these relics are utter garbage – con jobs rushed out from the workshops that dot the district – but, by the law of averages alone, some of the vast quantity of stuff that filters through Pilgrim's Walk *must* be genuine.

ASHTER AND QUINN

It is hard to determine which of the two landlords that own the entirety of Pilgrim's Walk is the worse specimen – whether it's the ghastly, long-dead and gas-bloated Undying known as Ashter or the blind, spindle-thin, rotten-toothed drow Quinn. It is common wisdom that both of them are equally vile.

The territory of Pilgrim's Walk is carved up between them, and each week thousands of half- and quarter-stens make their way from collection plates and poverty boxes down to Ashter and Quinn's voluminous pockets. The pair live lives of perverse and mouldering luxury – Quinn eating gold-flecked puddings off the backs of mewling, dumb captives and Ashter filling his devious brain with forbidden knowledge from his crumbling libraries – and, even though at face level the pair are rivals, equipping gangs of armed "faithful" and sending them in waves against the business interests of the other, they are in fact on good terms and often take coffee together in the private back-room of a neutral flophouse.

GEORGE

George has joined more cults than he's had hot dinners. He jingles when he walks (and he does so unsteadily thanks to a lack of depth perception and terrible drinking habit) due to the mass of sacred symbols hanging around his neck. He's been ordained in three different opposing factions of the same heretical underchurch, and unwittingly managed to escape the holy war that claimed the lives of every other member. He has his palms read hourly, refuses to wear his clothes the right way out, and occasionally employs a boy to make the sign of Our Glorious Lady over his brow once a minute, every minute, until he runs out of money.

Though he can't remember it with any clarity, George has joined almost every sect in Pilgrim's Walk in an effort to undo the bad fortune he suffered upon breaking a mirror at the age of 23. He hasn't found the right god yet – he is still destitute, still a washed-up drunk – but clearly something's going right for him, as he never gets robbed and always manages to find somewhere dry and quiet, if not especially comfortable, to sleep. The combined divine weight of lip service to a hundred gods is paying off – or maybe the green-eyed goddess of luck, Stolz, is looking out for him.

THE SOLAR BASILICA

The Solar Basilica is the grand seat of the theocratic power of the aelfir – their gods, brought down to Spire from their cold and ancient homes to the north, demanded proper devotion, and so the high elves spared no expense in building a truly awe-inspiring temple to worship them.

The area is divided up in a horseshoe-like shape, with temples to Mother Winter and Father Summer on the right and left flanking the grand entrance, and buildings devoted to Sister Spring and Brother Autumn behind them. In the centre of the horseshoe is a dazzling white and gold square dedicated to the

A FEW OF THE RELIGIONS CURRENTLY ACTIVE IN PILGRIM'S WALK

- The Church of All
- The Brothers of Seclusion
- The Great Eye
- The Stag Risen
- The Golden Serpent
- The Cult of the Vale
- Our Lady's Bounty
- Order of the Stilled Pond
- Sisterhood of the Eternal Queen
- The Grimoire
- The Compass Rose
- Spritanism
- The Tavian Sect
- The Destrians
- The Ossarians
- The Munificent Gathering for our Splendid Gilded Patron
- Tyondarians
- The Healers of the King
- The Congregation of Kinship
- Our Marbled Lady
- The Temple Furious
- The Church of the Eight
- Freeman's Church
- The Society of Silver
- Heralds of the Prophecy
- The Players of the Great Game
- The All-Conquering Church of the One and Only God
- Heralds of Mordegone
- The Asbinian Heresy
- The Hags
- The Dytoshian Iconoclasts

Great and Undivided Sun where hordes of pilgrims of all races stream back and forth between temples to pay their respects to their gods. The entire place is built of bright white and grey stone, colourful banners to the gods and goddesses hang from walls, and sunlight shines in from the open roof above.

PRIVATE WORSHIP

Hidden behind the facade of the basilica, behind the myriad balconies and fluttering pennants, behind the throngs of pilgrims, are the sacred places of the aelfir in which only they are allowed to congregate and worship. Here, the public face of the solar pantheon is thrown aside, and the "true" faith is practiced as it was in times of old, and still is in the regions far to the north.

THE PALADINS

Located within the buildings is the office of the Paladins, the militant arm of the solar pantheon, who devote their lives to service of Brother Harvest above all other gods. It is these well-trained men and women, made up largely of young aelfir, who hunt the Ministry and attempt to stamp out insurrection from the drow in all its forms, and their wrath is truly terrible to behold.

The battle-dress of the Paladins is gilded plate-armour and white robes, and their weapons range from devastating broadswords and hammers to keen scythes and sickles (the favoured implements of their deity). These are backed up by the best firearms that the aelfir can afford, siphoned off from the military, and it is not uncommon to see a squadron of Paladins bearing well-maintained military-grade pistols or shining, polished Legrand repeater rifles.

Their fury is terrifying to behold, and their justice is swift and merciless. Operating a wide network of spies and informants, the Paladins will gather information on their targets over a number of weeks and months before formulating a plan to utterly destroy them. Then, as dawn breaks, they will march forth from their hidden sanctuaries, and visit the wrath of the sun gods on their targets in a series of brutal, calculating strikes that leave most enemies dead, fleeing the city, or panicked and reeling. Associates are dragged out of their homes and shot in the street; rebel headquarters are burnt to the ground; clerics to forbidden gods are slain upon the altars of their masters, and their profane sites are made pure through the righteous power of the sun.

The one weakness of the Paladins is that they are few in number; they have a demanding recruitment and screening process that few can pass. Given the breadth and scale of the resistance within Spire, they leave most of the work to the guard and only devote their attention to the most crucial cases, or the most dangerous rebels: to root out the Ministry, and forever purge all worship of the heretic goddess known as Our Hidden Mistress, is their ultimate goal.

PALADIN

Names: Strides-Across-Dawn, Hare-Dashing-To-The-Hunter, Ten-Thousand-Loves

Descriptors: Bearing many relics, Tied-back red hair, Reading aloud from the Third Book of the Harvest

Difficulty: The Paladins are some of the best fighters in the entire city, and also the best equipped. Difficulty 2 across the board, unless you can even the odds somehow

Resistance: 7

Equipment: Paladin duty-plate (Armour 4) military-grade legrand rifles (D6, Ranged, Piercing) or carog-pattern shotguns (D6, Ranged, Point-blank, Reload) and nooses (D3, Debilitating) as well as sun-bombs (Ranged, Spread D3, Non-lethal) which they hurl into rooms before attacking

THE SOLAR PANTHEON

The aelfir worship many gods, but their primary faith is that of the Solar Pantheon – a family of four deities who represent different facets of the sun. Worship of the Solar Pantheon is strongly encouraged, and insufficient piety is commonly used as a slandering tactic to gain political ground against an opponent.

FATHER SUMMER, OR FATHER PLENTY, OR SUNLIGHT'S-ETERNAL-VIGOR: Father is represented by a strong, broad-shouldered, healthy-looking aelfir man in traditional dress – a colourful skirt, but barefoot and naked from the waist up – with his hair styled into a great halo around his head. (Aelfir gods are almost never depicted as wearing masks; seeing as most aelfir rarely, if ever, see another's aelfir's face, the artist most commonly uses their own as reference.) His domain is strength, growth, heartiness and power – it is from him that all aelfir gain their ability to withstand cold temperatures, their long lives, and their tall, graceful forms. Father is seen as good-natured and welcoming, and many festivals and feasts are held in his honour.

MOTHER WINTER, OR MOTHER MANY, OR SHIFTING-ETERNAL-BLESSING: Mother is shown as a stern aelfir woman in her middle years, and she is dressed in many fine silks and jewelry wrought from ice and snow. It is she that steers the sun through the sky, that speeds its passage during winter to freeze the world and slows it during summer so that crops might grow – she is a mistress of control and mastery, a creature of change and precision. From her, aelfir gain their mastery of the world and of their physical forms, and the power over temperature and ice that lets them control the climate in Amaranth.

BROTHER AUTUMN, OR BROTHER HARVEST, OR SCYTHES-CULL-THE-WEEPING: Humans would describe Brother as cruel: the high elves describe him with a word that best translates as "perfect". He knows nothing, but understands everything; he moves and acts with perfect grace and intuition. He is a harvest deity, and it is by his hand that all who live must die. He is a reminder that all who live must do so as beautifully and vitally as they can while they do, and from him the aelfir gain their keen insight and calculating minds. (The popularity of undying surgery within the aelfir community rubs against the tenets of belief espoused by Brother Harvest, and as such the sects devoted to him have been driven underground and into radicalism.)

SISTER SPRING, OR SISTER-SUNLIGHT, OR GLOWING-MELTS-THE-ICE: Sister is a young aelfir woman of uncanny, unparalleled beauty, and many high elf artisans dream of being asked to recreate her visage by a patron. She is fire, clarity, beauty, and change: a goddess of rebirth, new understanding and truth. Scholars and artists alike devote themselves to her, and it is rumoured that only she can melt everfrost, the eternal ice that resides beneath the homelands of the high elves, and when she does this world will end and a new, unrecognisable one will blossom in its place, built by her hand. From her, aelfir gain their artistry and perfect beauty.

For more details on worship of the aelfir Solar Gods – who many drow devote themselves to, following the fall of Spire – see page 74.

AVATARS

The high elf gods, it is said, descend to earth to walk among the aelfir in their ancestral homes to the north, and these creatures of divine beauty grace the aelfir with their wisdom and take husbands and wives. The exact way this occurs differs from region to region, but the vast majority of them make use of an aelfir of good standing who, through ritual and trance, takes on the form of the god or goddess for a period of time and speaks with their voice. Few survive the cocktail of psychoactive drugs and divine strain that is placed on their body, but to be chosen as the vessel of a god by the elders is considered a great honour for the high elf's family.

In a land where the Lajhan can shift their forms into patches of moonlight and followers of Charnel can transform into giant hyena-beasts through the power of their god, the idea of gods descending to the mortal realm to bond with their followers is not entirely ridiculous. But: try as they might, the aelfir cannot summon their deities to Spire. Perhaps it is the resonance of the place, or the tens of thousands of other gods worshipped here, or that their pantheon is tied to the ice and frost of their homes.

THE SUN-ON-EARTH

Rumour has it that the aelfir are crafting something truly wondrous, deep in the gilded caverns beneath the marble slabs of the basilica's floor – a replica of the sun on earth, summoned through devotion and sacrifice, and bound by the ingenuity of human retro-engineers. Should this plan succeed, their church will be able to draw power from it to work their miracles, the armies of the aelfir will be utterly unstoppable, and their dominion over the planet will be all but assured as a miniature sun glows in the sky above each detachment, scouring darkness and inferiority from the world.

Or: it could explode, given that it is a half-understood divine conflagration they are attempting to recreate in the mortal realm, and the resulting detonation could destroy the entire top half of Spire and blind anyone who sees it for hundreds of miles around.

NEW HEAVEN

Atop the Spire, ten thousand prayer flags flutter and snap in the screaming winds and red-mawed hyenas prowl the streets, ravenous and sacred. This is New Heaven, a place of worship, and a place for the dead.

Clustered throughout the district are pockets of worship for gods of the wind and sky, of weather and lightning – a masked and feathered cult devoted to capturing the winds here, a hermitage bristling with copper resonators that buzz and hum when thunder approaches there. It's said that the oracles of the Goddess of the Twenty Winds can tell you when it's going to rain, right down to the second, and if pressed they can shift oncoming weather patterns away from Spire by abjuring them like demons with their mouths full of dirt, and iron bars nailing their feet to the structure of the Spire. It's said that the corvids here have learned to speak, but they only do so in riddles and half-truths, and should never be trusted. It's said that, if one of true faith leaps from the highest point in New Heaven and plummets towards the ground with no fear in their heart, they'll be reborn as one of the blue-white doves that cluster around the steps of the holiest temples.

EATERS OF THE DEAD

A popular belief in Spire, possibly because of the lack of soft earth to bury corpses, is that dead bodies should be disposed of by carrion creatures and thus released back into the natural order. (Cremation remains popular amongst aelfir, who often find the idea of being pecked apart by ravens distasteful.)

In special structures called Towers of Silence, a white-robed sect of the Morticians carries the dead down devoted black-stone pathways and deposits them there to be eaten by eagles, vultures, ravens and crows. The central processionary is rarely quiet, often with rival funerals jostling for space thanks to inaccurate and insensitive double-booking policies common to many New Heaven morticians.

But: in the last fifty years, a new religion has sprung to prominence – devotion to Charnel, a drow faith all the way from the lands to the south, where Far Nujab borders with the Duchy of Aliquam and wild dogs prowl the tall and empty streets of the dead in vast, bone-strewn necropoli. In New Heaven, the drow have released packs of hyenas that breed and

interbreed, doubling in number every decade. They are charged with eating corpses to dispose of them with proper reverence (if you aren't eaten within a week of dying, they say, your ghost goes bad and the smell attracts demons).

An uneasy peace holds between the Morticians and the bone-clad, ghost-faced Carrion-Priests, but the hyenas grow hungry and their hunting grounds expand year on year, and rumours abound of gnolls hiding out deep in Carrion Row, the centre of the new Charnelite necropolis.

CHARNEL-SWORN HYENA PACK

Names: Sacred, Blessed, Hallowed, Wonder (yelled out by their handler, who has a name like Wresh, Al'esha, or Ahemain)

Descriptors: One eye, Facial piercings/barbs, Dyed red hair

Difficulty: Hyenas aren't especially skilled fighters: difficulty 0, but any attempt to escape from them or hide your tracks is at difficulty 1

Resistance: 3 per hyena, who'll usually run off rather than fighting to the death. If they have a handler with them, increase their resistance to 5 each. The handler has 5 resistance, too

Equipment: Teeth and claws (D3). The handler has Armour 1 (cured leather and bones), a heavy crossbow (D6, Ranged, Reload) and a Nujabian preyhook (D3, Ranged, Debilitating)

THE MOONSEEKERS OF GRIMALDI

The Moonseekers are a devotional cult centred around adoration of one man – the human inventor Grimaldi. This loose group of yellow-robed zealots reveres him as a visionary genius and provides for him by any means necessary, and loudly sings his praises from the rooftops with each and every sunrise. "O mighty Grimaldi," they howl, "O magnificent and wise one! He who guides us skyward with his graceful hand! He who the earth cannot hold! Praise be to our sagacious and benevolent master!"

Grimaldi, a famous hermit and recluse, hides away in a well-defended tower on the north side of Spire where he creates mechanical marvels for his worshippers, ever since he was exiled from the college of Gywnn-Enforr for reasons he never deigns to mention. His obsession (at present) is flight, and his followers are often gifted with robes that let them glide great distances and catch the wind, or spring-heeled boots that propel them storeys into the air, or wings made of woven feathers, or strange tubes that explode and rocket away into the sky when lit.

But he has spoken of late about flight of an entirely different kind: he wishes to fly to the moon, to meet the strange beings that live there and trade with them, bringing back ethereal and cobweb-light moonsilver to Spire. His requests to his followers, scrawled on scraps of yellowing paper or whispered through cracked lips and his long grey beard, have become more and more outlandish. Quite how he proposes to reach the moon is unknown, but many people – even those outside of his wide-eyed cult – reckon that if anyone can do it, he can.

Currently, four of the seven most important power blocs in Spire are sending agents to recruit, sabotage or assassinate Grimaldi, but so far none of them have succeeded.

THE DRUIDIC CHORUS AND THE KEEPERS OF THE HIVES

While the druidic faith might be common in the icy lands far to the north of Spire, and in the trackless deserts to the south, it's rare to find a devotee of the wild in the world's largest city. The presence of so much infrastructure and civilisation chafes against them like a yoke on a wild ox, and pretty soon most druids that visit either flee to the uninhabited foothills to the south-east or go mad and try to burn the whole thing down.

In New Heaven, though, enough of the structure is exposed to the outside world that small clans of druids, or druid-like worshippers, can maintain an existence here. Tending to windowboxes and rooftop gardens, these dirt-caked people with blazing eyes and filthy, matted hair prowl and sneak through the city streets, planting flowers and spreading seeds so that birds will visit the city.

Of all the birds that visit, though, the druids are keenest to attract cloud-larks – tiny white birds that sing and twitter at sunrise and sunset. The druids believe that the songs of these birds, as complex and multilayered as they are, tell of the future, and of forgotten pasts, and of secrets far below them in the lightless depths of the undercity. Two of the council members make frequent visits to the druidic chorus and ask them for guidance in exchange for rare seeds to grow in their gardens, so presumably their predictions aren't far off the mark.

There is a rival sect of druids, positioned against the chorus and its keepers, who worship the intricate

architecture of beehives, and plant flowers to attract them to New Heaven (and viciously guard the hives they build). Viewing the constructions and structured caste system of bees as evidence of civilisation emerging organically from nature, and not an abomination against it, they believe that there is great wisdom to be seen in the buildings of bees, and that they reflect things that may not be seen by mortal eyes. They are viewed as heretics by their fellows and would be killed on sight were it not for the way that assassins tend to be found, days later, their lifeless bodies grotesquely swollen from a hundred bee-stings.

RUNNING THE GAME

Gold-masked aelfir nobles, their gowns shifting through myriad colours. Mad-eyed cultists, hungry for blood, toting sawn-off shotguns and smoking braziers. The sound of flute and drum music echoing through the dark halls of Derelictus. Rain pattering against the slate and rope of Perch. A cannibal king on a heap of mouldering flesh. A minister's mother, finding their revolutionary materials, and working out how long she can hide her daughter from the authorities. An interdimensional blood parasite that manifests as a song.

Gamesmaster, you are all of the above and more.

As gamesmaster, you have an important job in Spire – you're in charge of everything that isn't a player character. That means non-player characters, but also the pacing of the game, describing the imaginary world of the city, moderating arguments at the table, knowing the rules, making sure everyone has fun and arranging when and where the game itself happens.

If that sounds like a lot of responsibility, it is. But if that sounds like a lot of work, it's not. We're going to help you make running the game as easy as possible, allowing you to settle back, relax, and tell a story with your players.

THE BASICS: MAKING THE GAME FUN

Roleplaying games are, primarily, a social activity, and as gamesmaster you're in charge of making sure that the experience is a positive one for everyone sitting at the table – including yourself. Here are a few tools and methods you can use to help you do that:

TALK TO EACH OTHER. Talk openly with each other about whether or not you're having fun. Check in with players every now and again to make sure they're doing okay. Don't be afraid to say when you don't like something, or you find something upsetting, or not fun.

You might feel a bit embarrassed to talk to people about limits (see Lines and Veils below) but establishing consent is important, and makes for a better game, so do it.

USE LINES AND VEILS. Drawn from the Nordic LARP scene, Lines and Veils are tools for letting other players know that you're not okay with certain things happening in the game. A Line is something you outright don't want at the table, and a Veil is something that you're okay with happening in-game, but you don't want to go into detail on it – you want to "draw a veil" over the scene, as it were, to leave it as an implication. Spire can deal with some difficult topics (racial discrimination, indentured servitude, oppression, murder, terror tactics, body horror, mind control, etc) and it can be good to establish what's on and off the table before you start.

These are useful tools but sometimes they can involve telling a group of strangers a list of your fears, which may not be useful for some, which is why we also advise that you...

USE THE X CARD. This is a tool created by John Stavropoulos, and we use it in all of our games. Take a card and draw an X on it, then place it in the centre of the table, and tell your players that if they don't like something in the story – and that goes for stuff you create or things that the other players do and say – that they can touch the card, and you all agree to stop doing whatever it was that upset them. There's no need to explain why at

any point; it just stops, and you don't bring it up again. If this means that you need to rearrange the plot or a character a little bit, so be it – that's less important than any individual at the table.

The X Card is great because it functions as a safe word for roleplaying, and allows you to tackle some exciting and upsetting subjects with the understanding that people are encouraged to stop it if they're uncomfortable.

OUR LINES AND VEILS

These are the general basic rules for any table we run:

LINES: I don't want to tell a story about: rape, child abuse.

VEILS: I don't want to go into detail on: torture, sex.

GENERAL GM ADVICE

YOU NEVER ROLL DICE. Well – you roll dice to see how much stress you inflict on players, but that's it. You never have to roll a dice to make something happen: you just say that it does, and it does. Players can resist, or fight back, if they want – that's where the dice come in.

DON'T MAKE PLAYERS ROLL DICE UNLESS THEY HAVE TO. The rules of the game are intended to sit in the background, and the majority of a session will be spent having a conversation in which you tell a story. If you feel the story moving a certain way, let it – you don't need to roll dice.

SOMETHING'S ALWAYS AT STAKE. Don't ask the player to roll dice unless there's something at stake – that is, unless you can envisage a way the task would mark stress against one of their resistances. If you can't figure out what could go wrong, and if you can but it's not interesting, don't bother asking for a roll.

MAKE NOTES, THEN REFER TO THEM. They don't have to be exhaustive, but try to write down whatever you or your players say that you find interesting or that you think will come up again in play. You won't use all of it, but it helps to have it there.

SAY YES. When a player asks a question, it's an indication they want the game to go in a certain way. Try to say yes to queries when you can, because it moves the story and play onwards rather than stopping it in its tracks.

FAIL FORWARD. A failed roll isn't a block in a storyline, it's a different branch – something always happens. Whenever a player rolls the dice, change the world in some way as a response, or give them some information.

RE-USE BEFORE YOU INVENT. Always try to use old material (characters, locations, etc) that the players have interacted with before rather than inventing new material, because re-using established facts is how improvised stories gain traction and weight. If the players establish a church as their home base in the first game, call back to it every time they have a meeting. If they go shopping and meet a particular trader, have that trader crop up again next time they go shopping. It's easy, and it works.

ASK QUESTIONS, AND LISTEN TO THE ANSWERS. If you don't know precisely what's what in a particular situation (i.e. if a player asks "Are there any dealers in the occult round here?") then feel free to turn the question back on the players ("Tell me, are there any dealers round here? If there are, what are they like? If not, why not?"). Use their answers, everyone will feel more engaged with the story, and you didn't have to do any work.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO CHANGE STUFF. The players are going to change things – the city will not be the same at the start of the campaign as it is at the end if you all do your jobs right. To that end, if you want to rewrite part of the setting on the fly, go for it. Maybe all your Knights are hollow suits of armour animated by sentient wasps. Maybe your Carrion-Priests flooded New Heaven with vultures, not hyenas. Maybe the rivers are full of giant carp that people ride around. Maybe the gods descend to the streets and walk among their worshippers. It's all up to you – whatever gets you and your players excited is the "right" way to play, not sticking slavishly to canon.

THEME AND TONE

We've tried to establish a few themes and tones with Spire, but to give you a hand with recreating them

in your game, we've outlined them below. You don't have to choose all, or indeed any, of these, but they're what we've used to paint the world as we see it.

PEOPLE-AS-THINGS. What happens when you stop thinking of people as people, and start thinking of them as things? The aelfir view all other races as animals, or worse, which is why they're the bad guys. But what about a character's bonds – will the players sacrifice those to get ahead? Will they lose sight of the people they're saving, blinded by their duty?

PUNK. The system of governance isn't corrupt, per se, inasmuch as it's openly unfair and cruel. The aelfir don't care about the drow, and only keep them around as a source of labour and entertainment; you'll find a good aelfir here and there, sure, but most of them – and the system which they built and perpetuate – hates drow and affords them no opportunities. Authority doesn't respect you, so why should you respect authority? Take everything you can get.

RELIGION AS POWER. There is a church on every corner, and a shrine in every bedroom; everyone prays to something, because religion is one of the few available sources of community and sanity that remains within the city. Two of the three goddess-sisters that make up the prominent drow faith in Spire have been banned by order of the aelfir, driving those religions underground and into radicalism; the Solar Pantheon, a bright and alien church that carries with it the strange morality of the high elves, replaces them. The Ministry is waging a holy war, in its own quiet way, after the aelfir won theirs hundreds of years ago.

BRUTAL VIOLENCE. Violence is kept on-camera, and it's grim; bones snap, teeth are ripped out of jaws, blood gets everywhere, people soil themselves and die, messy and wet, in forgotten dead-end alleys and unlit basements. Combat is not glorious, even if it's undeniably effective, and that person you killed has a name and loved ones waiting at home and was probably just doing their job. Let players engage in violence, and then pull no punches as to the descriptions. Make them regret their decisions. Make their opponents pathetic and scared and shuddering and humanised in their final moments. (And, if you can, give every single person a name, and maybe have their friends shout it out when they die.)

ARE THE GODS REAL?

Short answer? We don't know. Long answer? There's no way of proving it one way or another. Magic is real, for sure, but the fact that divine magic is just occult magic that's been practiced for centuries and dressed up as religion suggests that maybe there's no such thing as a "god" in the way their followers would believe there to be. Maybe the whole thing is just interdimensional power from the same source, and gods are just means of understanding it.

As the GM, it's up to you, but seeing as we only see what we want to see, and we only have our own senses to process data, it doesn't really matter whether gods are real or not. It's whether you believe in them, and what that makes you do, that matters.

UNCOMFORTABLE DECISIONS. What are you prepared to do to take back the city? What constitutes an acceptable sacrifice? Are all aelfir worthy of death? What about their allies? Present options to the players that will win them battles, but at horrendous costs.

THE REVOLUTION

Your players are about to undertake something tremendously exciting: they're going to try and overthrow the city and take it for themselves (or: a district, or a street. But they're taking the power back). You can break down a revolutionary act into three parts:

STAGE ONE: THE GATHERING STORM

You can't run a rebellion without information or supplies. In the first section, the players will uncover information about the world around them – who's in charge of who, who can be turned, who needs to be eliminated, and so on – as well as recruiting people to the cause, knowingly or not.

STAGE TWO: THE STRIKE

During the strike, the players push their plans into action and attempt to affect a great change in Spire for the good of the dark elves. People die, allies are betrayed, guard houses are overrun, and whatever

factions have been roped in to draw attention away from their operation smash into the authorities. Should things go well, they'll be in charge of something – or they'll have created a power void, and people will be looking to fill it.

STAGE THREE: THE AFTERMATH

Once the dust settles, the realities of the conflict set in. The players' superiors come asking questions and favours, or maybe take over the operation wholesale and push them into a different wing of the revolution. The authorities, if they've noticed the act, will move to try and regain ground and must be resisted, or wrong-footed. The realisation that their work is far from over, and will never be over, dawns on the players.

A lot of stories will boil down into this pattern: planning, execution, and consequences. You'll probably spend a lot of your time on the planning stage, because players like to amass information, and also because it gives you and your group time to explore their characters and assess the lay of the land before committing to a particular path of action.

SOW THE SEEDS OF DISSENT: RUNNING THE GATHERING STORM

This is the stage of the game where you, GM, will have to do the most work. You'll need to flesh out a section of the city that has the capacity to be turned against itself, and the easiest way to do this is to ask your players directly what they're interested in doing.

A lot of gamesmastery guides will suggest that you try to second-guess and wrong-foot your players so the plot is a surprise, but we can't recommend that; you'll have a far better time if you're honest with each other. So don't write the plot until your players have made their characters – or, better yet, do it at the same time. Ask your players what parts of the city excite them, what they'd like to see their characters doing, and work it out together as a group. You don't need to tell them everything – some surprises are nice, after all – but you can save a lot of time and a lot of bored players by sketching out the rough ideas of the plot together.

This is going to be an act of compromise with a lot of back-and-forth; if you're interested in telling a tense political story of betrayal and deceit, whereas half of your players want to get in fights in the North Docks and the other half want to scrub around the Heart in search of forbidden magic, none of you are going to enjoy yourselves. Work together to figure out a way to marry the different ideas together; in the previous example, for instance, you could have traders selling illegal magic run-off from the Heart in the North Docks, and various factions interested in stopping or controlling the trade.

THINGS YOU CAN ASSUME PEOPLE WANT IF THEY PICK A PARTICULAR CHARACTER CLASS

Azurite: To make deals, to buy and sell things, to lie and cheat, to sit at the sidelines while their pawns achieve their ends

Bound: To hunt villains, to sneak and steal, to fight against authority, to take the law into their own hands, to be a hero of the people

Carrion-Priest: To get involved with death and corpses, to be the underdog, to be wild, to intimidate people, to fight and kill

Firebrand: To lead a revolution, to incite action, to be charismatic, to fight authority, to be roguish and try their hand at anything

Idol: To engage in high society, to set up fancy parties, to talk their way into and out of problems, to create art, to control others

Knight: To get in trouble, to be a have-a-go-hero, to drink, to pretend they still have some kind of honour

Lajhan: To help people, to heal people and communities, to support the dark elf race, to search for hidden knowledge

Masked: To fight the aelfir, to engage in high society, to lie and use disguises, to engage in cruelty

Midwife: To defend the defenceless, to be an authority on drow culture and philosophy, to explore occult mysteries, to scare people

Vermissian Sage: To uncover hidden mysteries, to explore the occult, to apply their knowledge and research solutions to problems

THINK IN TERMS OF CHANGE

The advancement system in Spire focuses on changing the city, so give your players the opportunity to change things. You can expect to offer a low advance in most sessions, a medium advance every three or four, and a high advance at the culmination of a multiple-game arc. In fact, thinking in terms of the changes and goals your players have access to can be a good way to sketch out a campaign – start with a high goal and work backwards from there.

SUBVERSION

It isn't enough to just go and kick in some teeth and hope that you'll dethrone the aelfir; there has to be something that you can subvert, or bring under your control, that will have a wider effect. If you can take out a dangerous and corrupt (in the wrong way) guard captain, that's all well and good, but there'll be another five waiting to take her place, and innocent people are going to get caught in the crossfire. Far better to have someone to replace her waiting in the wings – someone you've got blackmail material on, or who's a member of the Ministry, or a who's hapless rube under your control, or preferably all three.

As the GM, it's your duty to present items, structures, organisations and people that can be subverted; to provide weak links when the players look for them, to offer them weapons that they can turn against their oppressors.

Get nasty with it, too; create illegal chemical weapons that blind their targets and flood a district with noxious gas. Hand them a powerful magic ritual that will require the sacrifice of hundreds to cast. Offer them the support of a cell of unstable cannibal murderers. Have a skywhale packed full of explosives floating just off-Spire. You don't have to force them to use these horrendous things, but you'll find it fun to watch them justify it.

MISSION-BASED PLAY VS HOOK-BASED PLAY

As the player characters all belong to the Ministry, it's entirely possible to strongarm them into plots and actions by having their superiors arrive and order them to do it. This, however, doesn't make for hugely satisfying play, and can leave players feeling bereft of choice or impact on the plot, unable to do anything other than the predetermined mission. It's useful for one-shots, or to speed things up when play starts dragging, but we're much more in favour of using the Ministry as a catalyst. Encouraging players to investigate a particular area, for example, or asking them to tail a certain person and act on their initiative, can open up stories that the players can look into at their own pace.

Alternatively, you can look to draw characters in by connecting events to their interests and motivations; this is a nice way to ensure that the story you have in mind will engage them, at least at the beginning, even if it's trickier than just outright telling them in-character to go and do it. It's not a huge leap, though: going from "the Ministry tells you to investigate this bar" to "you've noticed that police presence is unusually high around this bar, so you decide to check it out" for a Firebrand or "you've noticed an unusually large number of unmarked crates going into this bar, so you decide to take a look" for an Azurite, and so on.

Also, if you want to mix things up a little, you can deliver *additional* orders from the Ministry that complicate or intensify the main storyline. What if the person they're tailing (and planning to assassinate) is vital to the revolution? What if they receive a demand to requisition supplies from the mansion they're breaking into during an investigation? What if they receive word that their Bonds have been talking to the city guard?

INTRODUCE PEOPLE

People are, in general, better than things. People can talk, and lie, and give information; people can act on their own volition, and react to events happening around them. Whenever you can, put a name and a face to a concept if you can, and let players talk to them. As ever, note down which ones the players are interested in, and re-use them.

WHILE THE IRON'S HOT: RUNNING THE STRIKE

Things are in place, and the players have an understanding (rightly or not) of how the world fits together. They've identified a weak point in the enemy's defences and are attempting to take advantage. Here's how to make the most of that.

FIND A JOB FOR EVERYONE

Players will commonly find roles for their characters to fill, but – especially if things get violent – you might notice some players hanging back or letting the others get all the glory (and, as it just so happens, shoulder all the risk). It's your job as GM to offer up problems and opportunities that can engage everyone, and let them have their screen time.

ASK DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Nothing goes smoothly, and during the strike, people are pressed for time. What are people prepared to endanger for the sake of the revolution? Find multiple problems for the characters to tackle at once; have them pulled in many different directions, and have there be no right answer. Have a villain flee and leave

an ally injured and bleeding out on the street, and push them into splitting the party or making a difficult choice. Have the police garrison they firebomb be staffed by a skeleton crew, as the remainder of the guard has been sent to crack down on their neighbourhood following reports of rebellious activity. Not every scene has to present a horrendous cost (and nor should it), but it can help to add more drama to proceedings.

CUT BETWEEN SCENES

Don't be afraid to have multiple scenes running at once. Maybe one group of players stays back to hold off reinforcements and a second group runs off to spring their ally from jail. Maybe a group of researchers is frantically looking for a sorcerer's weakness while the other half of the party sneaks through his house, aiming to interrupt his dark ritual. As long as you can keep the pacing even, cutting between events can make sure that everyone feels involved and useful with regards to the strike.

PICKING UP THE PIECES: RUNNING THE AFTERMATH

Once the dust settles and the blood has cooled, allow the characters time to celebrate - or commiserate - but not too long, as the city has a way of catching up with them. The aftermath should illustrate that everything has a consequence, that victories are short-lived, and failures are cruelly punished.

REACT TO THE PLAYERS' ACTIONS

You'll want to consider what path of action different power blocs might take – even ones that the players haven't yet realised are involved. Pushing the city guard out of one location might result in them pulling out of the district entirely and letting it govern itself, or establishing firm checkpoints and borders around the area, or handing the job over to the army who suppress insurrection in a series of rapid, brutal strikes.

When the players succeed, that means that a) someone will get in trouble for it and b) someone more powerful than them will be upset, and potentially take action. Have a think about the power structures involved in your story – who are people answering to, and taking orders from? Who's manipulating events from behind the scenes?

You don't have to play your hand right away, but if you do something, you should show a knock-on effect that it has – or describe events that none of the characters can see, but that add complexity to the narrative by the players knowing about them.

RE-INTRODUCE PEOPLE

Odds are, those people you brought in during the gathering storm are going to be affected by what just happened, so don't hold back on having them show that to the players. There's a world of difference between describing a run-down neighbourhood suffering under the weight of increased police attention and describing a player's Bond turning up to the meeting, black-eyed and missing teeth, because they were caught trespassing after curfew.

DIFFICULTY, AND HOW TO APPLY IT

Difficulty is the one tool you have in your arsenal to use against the player characters; for each point of difficulty a task has, the player will be forced to remove one dice from their pool before they roll. Seeing as the maximum pool size is four (save a few outlying exceptions), taking one or two dice out of it can make a significant impact.

Don't be afraid to use difficulty on actions, especially if you think succeeding cleanly is going to be tricky – it's not a fun story if the heroes get their way all of the time, is it? When a player character attempts something that sounds complicated, or that is risky but would give them a huge benefit if they succeed, slap a point of difficulty on it.

Remember: if a player doesn't have enough dice to lose due to difficulty, you'll limit their eventual success by one step for each dice they didn't lose. For example: a player has a dice pool of 2, and they attempt a difficulty 2 action. This means that they'll roll a single dice, and you'll treat the result as though it was one step lower – so if they rolled 8-9, you'd treat it as 6-7 instead.

DIFFICULTY RATINGS

DIFFICULTY 0: A standard task, if there is such a thing in the day-to-day work of the Ministry. It's certainly not without risk, and there's definitely something at stake, but given proper training and knowledge, the player can expect to pull this off (if a task would be easier to achieve than this, assume success is automatic).

Examples: Evading the attention of mobsters in Red Row; finding a safe entrance to the Vermissian; buying an illegal pistol from an arms dealer.

DIFFICULTY 1: Something, or someone, is making the action harder than usual. Even a skilled operative will struggle to succeed most of the time.

Examples: Escaping through knee-deep water; tracking a target through the hustle and bustle of the Blue Market on a festival day; resisting the interrogation delivered by a skilled aelfir knifemaiden.

DIFFICULTY 2: It doesn't get much harder than this without becoming an automatic failure, and even then, a character with the best training and expertise will find themselves relying on chance. Without, they've got no hope of pulling it off cleanly.

Examples: Fighting in pitch darkness against enemies who can see without light; sneaking into the heavily-guarded Council Chambers up-Spire; finding a safe route through the shifting passageways of the Heart to reach the Mansion.

A GOOD VILLAIN

Your story needs a villain. Preferably it needs more than one – a set of interlocking nested bastards, all of whom are trying to tread on the drow to increase their own power base. Although the crux of Spire is change – transforming the city into one that they'd prefer to live in – it's no fun to enact that change without someone to push against.

Villains can do some pretty reprehensible stuff, but remember: no-one thinks that they're the bad guys. In their eyes, the players are the villains – deranged cultists of one or more forbidden gods, worshiping at altars in lightless, flooded basements, robbing and murdering good hard-working folk. Their actions endanger everyone in Spire, and if people just toed the line and did what the city guard (and by extension, the council) asked of them, everything would go smoothly.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself about your villain:

- What do they want?
- How do they think they're going to get it?
- What crimes against drow have they committed to do it?
- What happens when they get it?
- Who do they control?
- How do they hold power?
- What do they look like? Pick three words that define them.
- What do they want to look like? Again, pick three words.
- What does everyone say about them?
- What's their biggest secret?
- Who do they love, and why?
- Who do they answer to?
- What are they scared of?

Some of these questions might not seem obvious in their application; they're designed to not only position the villain in the story, but to flesh them out as a person, because people can be dethroned and defeated. Everyone has a weakness; everyone wants something other than their primary goal; no-one acts perfectly logically all the time, and the players can take advantage of that. Their cell doesn't have the resources to take on, say, the crime lords of Red Row in a straight-up fight – but they probably have the resources to abduct their loved ones and use them as leverage, or to prey on their insecurities to create an opportunity. (Not that you're going to encourage the players to kidnap someone's mum and threaten to kill her, of course. But give them the option, and let them consider it.)

A SAMPLE VILLAIN

Hertza Vex, a human Spire ascendant cultist, is looking to awaken the structure of the Spire as a goddess. She is a recent arrival to the city, having taken a teaching post in Gywnn-Enforr university six years ago, but during that time she has quickly risen through the ranks of her sect.

What do they want? To awaken the god that dwells within the city of Spire and sit upon its right hand.

How do they think they're going to get it? By detonating explosives within the structure of the city to rid it of the parasites that live upon it and sap its energy.

What crimes against drow have they committed to do it? She has blown half of Perch off the side of the city and has designs on the North Docks.

What happens when they get it? The city will awaken as a great and terrible god, of an as yet unknown domain, and she will be blessed by it.

What weapons do they have in their arsenal? She is independently wealthy, and uses her resources to bribe the city guard into acting as enforcers for her schemes. She has also actively recruited members of the Crimson Vigil into the Spire Ascendant and uses them as blunt instruments in dealing with people who pry into her schemes.

How do they hold power? Her positions within the university and the Spire Ascendant allow her a great deal of sway in political situations. She rarely bothers herself with the realities of enforcing her will.

What do they look like? Pick three words that define them. Hunched. Silver. Precise.

What do they want to look like? Again, pick three words. Flowing. Tall. Red.

What does everyone say about them? That she's incredibly smart, and ruthless when it comes to pursuing her academic aims.

What's their biggest secret? That she's a member of the Spire Ascendant, and is working to trigger an apotheosis. She could never let it get out amongst her fellows.

Who do they love, and why? A student of hers, a young drow girl, called Esmer, because she's young and beautiful and clever and asks difficult questions; her mother Carys Vex, who resides in Ivory Row, who always wanted the best for her and is nearing the end of her life; her dog, Lucien, who's a bit old but means well.

Who do they answer to? Her superiors in the sect. Primary amongst them is Lady Grendylmyn Stars-Softly-Shine, a council member, who has suspected her of trying to oust her for months now.

What are they scared of? That she'll be found out, her academic career will be ruined, and her scheme to awaken the Spire (which she's not entirely confident will work) will be scuppered, and she'll be exiled or shot for her crimes.

For henchmen, lieutenants, unwitting dupes or pawns in your villain's scheme, you can go through the list above again or answer the following shorter list of questions for them:

Why were they chosen by the villain to serve?
What sets them apart from the rest of their faction?
What, or who, do they desire?
What, or who, do they despise?

OTHER FACTIONS

An important part of helping Spire feel like a functioning city, riddled with shadows and misdirection, is to put in people other than the primary antagonists. On page 210 there's a table that lets you roll up random groups to throw into your plot – we recommend doing this, and then working out how those groups would fit into the story and how they'd react to the player characters' actions. It's always interesting to have a neutral, turnable, or dupable third party to add complexity to a story and afford both you and the players additional avenues of plot.

MAKING THE CITY YOUR OWN

Although we've taken great pains to make Spire feel unique, we want you to change it. When you play through your campaign, you should tweak and change anything you desire – after all, the *theme* of the game is change, and your players will be working to make as many changes as possible in an attempt to level up their characters.

MAGIC

How common is magic in your game?

Perhaps magic is fiercely controlled by the state, with the Council issuing licenses to practice it from on high. The city guard are in charge of capturing illegal practitioners and bringing them to justice – not only occultists who are unearthing the secrets of dark magic, but Lajhan and Azurites who will not, or cannot, pay their dues. Occult magic is all but banned throughout Spire, except in special units in the army or research divisions in the universities, and those who dabble in it are seen as witches.

Maybe each church and order of wizards is protective of their own spells, not letting them into the hands of outsiders, and don't like to cast spells in front of the uninitiated without good reason or first dressing them up in layers of secrecy and misdirection.

Or maybe the city is free and easy with magic, seeing it as a means of expression or a gift from the gods, and encourages its use in public spaces. Most people know a trick or two: a prayer to a sun god to help light a fire, a rite from a goddess of pathways to ensure a door stays locked while they sleep, a little black-market, black-magic lipstick to cast a minor glamour over themselves before they leave the house. These cantrips have no in-game benefit, but simply make up the patchwork of everyday life.

THE MINISTRY

How weird is the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress in your game?

We've written the Ministry as a secret society crossed with a paramilitary organisation, and in play it tends to function more as a means of uniting players and delivering information without interfering much in play. But, in your game, you can change that.

You could up the weird cultish elements of it, bringing the circles of hidden knowledge and bizarre initiation rites to the fore (for example: run a prelude game where players act out scenes from their initiation, and decide what they learned, and what they lost). The magister, when they're seen, is vague and mercurial and evades direct answers, and they are a skilled ritualist with regard to the arts of the Mistress. Perhaps the exarchs or the oracles show up to throw their weight around, too, and it becomes apparent that players are pawns in a grand game of chess.

It could be more paramilitary, or more learning towards espionage, with characters receiving clear orders and being expected to report back to their magister with regular updates. Magisters will use fieldwork terminology, and the campaign will focus more on the realities of fighting an undercover war in your home city than the mystical nature of the goddess.

Or it might be informal; the cultish stuff is there, sure, but it's all for the higher-ups, and there's at least three levels of command between the players and the ministers – the day-to-day happenings of rebellion occur in the back rooms of bars, in bedrooms and kitchens, and few people swear fealty to the goddess – this is about the future of the drow, first and foremost, and practicality trumps everything else.

VILLAINY

How evil are the aelfir in your game?

They are, of course, the main villains in the story. But the extent of that villainy, and whether everything you've read in this book is true, is up to you.

Perhaps your high elves are full-bore pantomime villains who enjoy torturing innocent drow and lead debauched lives of senseless excess, drinking and smoking and rutting their way through their sordid, glamorous existences. This is useful for one-shots, if you want to get your players motivated to start kicking in doors and making trouble.

Or: some of them are like that, sure, and some of them are normal people just like the players but they happen to have been born into immense privilege, and there's a spectrum. There are poor aelfir, sympathetic aelfir who help the Ministry, socialist aelfir, and so on. This is good if you want to skew the discussion of morality towards grey areas – the aelfir aren't demons to be banished, but people to be dealt with. Their power structure is evil, but most individuals aren't.

Perhaps they're not evil as we'd think of it, but more alien in nature. They don't understand why drow are complaining, because this is the natural order of things. They can't feel sadness, and pain is a sort of fascinating and exciting experience to them, so they might genuinely be confused as to why you're sad because they just killed and ate your dog. This is a trickier one to pitch, but it works well if the aelfir aren't the main antagonists in the story you're telling – maybe the players are battling loyalist drow, or human cultists of the machine god, and the high elves occasionally swan into the plot, obsessed with the mirroring of the patterns exhibited in the night sky and in certain people's irises, more weird and unknowable than inherently wicked.

Maybe they're not evil, and the principle of durance is an old-fashioned embarrassment that most right-thinking aelfir are trying to move away from – but a handful of old guard are keeping it going. Even if you served under an absolute monster, most of the aelfir you meet are basically decent people.

Secondly – how villainous do the populace, on the whole, believe the Ministry to be? Are they noble folk heroes, striving to better the lot of their race? Are they a fringe cult of terrorist zealots who are going to get innocent drow killed, either from their repercussions or directly from their actions? Are they largely unheard of – just a myth to scare aelfir children at night? Are they a false flag operation, set up by the aelfir themselves, to attract and control rebellious drow?

A lot of this depends on the behaviour of the players in your game – after all, they're setting the tone.

DOING HORRIBLE THINGS

Several of the abilities in this game feature mind-control in some way; the high-level powers of the Azurite, the Gestalt mask from the Masked class, rites of Our Hidden Mistress and pretty much half of the Idol's powers involve reaching into someone's mind and rearranging what they believe to be true and false.

Similarly, a lot of this game might focus around violence and betrayal. Odds are your brother-in-law doesn't know you're a minister, and when he finds out he says he's going to report you to the guard, and you're carrying a gun… what are you going to do? Are you going to let him?

We didn't want to outright state what's good and evil, but we wanted to measure the stress that performing bad acts for good reasons (or even for bad reasons) can put on the fragile mortal mind. To that end, be generous when it comes to marking stress against Mind if the character is performing morally questionable or reprehensible acts (or just stressful acts; sure, you might not be hurt as you scramble out of the burning building, but that's going to leave you shaken).

As ever, we ask you to use your common sense when assigning stress. If this is the first time the character's shot and buried a family member for the sake of the revolution, that's D8 stress. If it's the fifth, they might not take mental stress at all.

APPENDIX 1: THE NEW GODS

THE NEW GODS

Each year, scores of new religions stream through the Blue Port and into Spire, filling the streets of Pilgrim's Walk and New Heaven with sacred bells and howled prayers. The following eight gods have arrived within the last decade, and already secured a number of devoted worshippers.

PATRON SAINTS

These gods are our way of saying thank you to some people who donated especially generously to our Kickstarter campaign. We've included their names in each entry, so you can tell which is which.

Many of these gods are human, or at least human in origin, but drow can still worship them in exchange for power.

ISHTUK, GOD OF PERSONAL DEMONS

[COMMISSIONED BY ALEX HOWARD WHITAKER]

In the rocky desert far to the south, in addition to worship of the three goddesses – as is expected of all pious dark elves – the drow of Aliquam worship a wide variety of gods that they have collected as part of the passages of their roving wagon-train. Ishtuk is one of these – the brother of Charnel, whose Carrion-Priest cultists line the streets of New Heaven – and he is a grey and tired-eyed creature whose balm is sought by grim, stone-faced drow. Theirs is a life of self-denial and mastery, of gratification so delayed it never arrives.

The Ishtukian faith was the most dominant faith of all of Aliquam, an age ago, until their fortunes changed and the stern, conservative ruling elite were gradually replaced with bon vivants and charismatic charlatans, whose laissez-faire politics mark the stereotypical view of Aliquami politics today.

Ishtuk preaches the chaining of one's demons – if kept on a leash, it is argued, they can be of use to the afflicted. With a dose of magical energy, the demons can quite literally be expelled and chained, or sent off to do your bidding.

REQUIREMENT: Forswear something that you love upon the altar of Ishtuk, a bare-walled but well-swept temple in the depths of New Heaven.

REFRESH: Be tempted, and refrain at a cost to yourself. Usually this involves a Resist roll of some kind.

ADVANCES

LOW

THE STENCH OF VICE. [Divine] *You can smell the stink of desire coming off those around you.* Mark D3 stress to Mind to cast this spell. Indicate an NPC that you have spent an hour observing (or a few minutes chatting to). The GM will tell you what their vice is, and how long it's been since they indulged it.

MEDIUM

NOXIOUS EXPECTORATION. [Divine] *You can cough and retch up misfortune and longing.* Once per session, you can cough up all accrued stress as a mouthful of noxious black tar. This tar functions as a weapon with a different profile depending on the amount of Mind stress you cleared:

1-3	D6, One-Shot
4-7	D6, Penetrating, Ranged, One-Shot
8+	D8, Penetrating, Ranged, Spread D6, One-Shot

The tar can also easily melt through most materials, but it gives off waves of stinking vapour as it does. When you cast this spell, take the SHAKEN fallout to represent the effects on your body.

CAST OUT THE WANTFUL. [Divine] *You birth a homunculus of want.* Mark D6 stress to Blood or Mind to cast this spell. As part of an hour-long purification ritual, you conjure forth from your innards a grim, animate manifestation of your desires. The appearance of the creature is up to you, but it will be no larger than a dog.

While the creature is outside you, you cannot be tempted by your vice (but you cannot use this ability to trigger your refresh ability). It will obey your commands as best it is able. It is clearly magical and unpleasant to look at, and probably speaks with a cracked, hoary version of your own voice. It is good at sneaking, watching and stealing, and its tarry, stinging grasp inflicts D3 damage in combat.

Before the next dawn, you must accept the horrendous creature back inside yourself, or mark 1 stress to Mind (but still be immune to your cravings). You must mark 1 additional stress to Mind for each dawn that passes.

GLUTTON'S CURSE. [Divine] *You unveil the true nature of your target - a wanton beast, driven by dark impulses.* Mark D6 stress to Blood or Mind to cast this spell. The target, with whom you must lock eyes for a second, is driven to pursue their basest urges until the next dawn.

LUXULYAN, THE DUKE OF AIR

[COMMISSIONED BY ANDY MOORE]

Followers of the human god Luxulyan build skyshrines: personal powered flight units that allow them, with a mixture of technological know-how and divine assistance, to fly. Though their designs differ between the faithful – from feathered cloaks hiding collapsible struts, to buzzing ultra-light metal wings woven by steelweaver spiders, to great and unwieldy contraptions of wood and taut linen – these are devotional altars as well as sacred instruments, so they are decorated with dozens of gewgaws dedicated to the Duke of Air. Feathers, materials from the skyshrines of deceased faithful, bottled air from particularly rare altitudes, pressure indicators and holy barometric scrying devices; a true Luxulyite makes a jingling sound as they walk, and takes their skyshrine off only when absolutely necessary.

Driven out of New Heaven by the disciples of Grimaldi, the cult of Luxulyan now resides in the Sky Docks amongst the knot of other foreign temples in the centre of the district, and makes a decent wage on the side assisting the transfer of goods from docked skywhales to the city itself. They are welcoming, if a little strange, and new members are greeted with open arms – presuming they have the knack of building their own skyshrine and joining their brothers and sisters in the sacred act of flight.

REQUIREMENT: Gain the trust of the cult of Luxulyan through taking part in their terrifying initiation ceremonies.

REFRESH: Add something significant to your skyshrine and sanctify it with flight.

ADVANCES

MEDIUM

SKYSHRINE. [Divine] Y*ou build a skyshrine: a device that channels the energy of the divine into glorious flight.* Your skyshrine functions as an NPC bond, although it does not accrue stress in the same way as standard bonds. Whilst wearing (or depending on its size, sitting in) your skyshrine, you can mark stress to the Bond to use the power of flight:

With all of the following powers, you can bring along as many people as you can hang on to (or who can hang on to you) at a cost of additional 1 stress per person carried.

GLIDE. [Divine] Mark 1 stress to your skyshrine to cast this spell. Until the end of the current situation, you will fall slowly, and safely, from any height.

LEAP. [Divine] Mark D3 stress to your skyshrine to cast this spell. Until the end of the current situation, you can leap a solid 30ft straight upwards, about 50ft horizontally, and land safely from any height.

HOVER. [Divine] Mark D3 stress to your skyshrine to cast this spell. Until the end of the current situation, you can hover at your current height without fear of falling. You can adjust your height up or down at a rate of about 3ft a second: it's not especially fast.

FLY. [Divine] Mark D6 stress to your skyshrine to cast this spell. Until the end of the current situation, you can fly with the same speed and maneuverability as a heavy bird – something like a goose or swan. Unless you also cast LEAP, you'll need to get a run-up or jump off something tall to gain enough speed to fly.

Roll for fallout when you mark stress to the bond, rather than waiting until the end of the session to do so. It uses the following special fallout table:

MINOR

INEFFICIENT. [Skyshrine] Something non-essential breaks, and it takes much more power to keep you in the air. Until the end of the next session, increase all stress marked to the skyshrine by 1.

MODERATE

INOPERABLE. [Skyshrine] At the end of the current situation, your skyshrine ceases to function until you take it back to the cult temple and resanctify it with the help of your fellow believers.

SEVERE

CRASH. [Skyshrine] As INOPERABLE, but it ceases to function at the worst possible time, and you cause yourself great harm. Choose: either sacrifice the skyshrine and mark D6 stress to Blood (and be unable to cast spells through it until you spend another Medium advance to buy it again) or mark D8, Brutal stress to Blood but save your skyshrine in the process.

APASH, THE MARTYR OF WHITECROSS

[COMMISSIONED BY APOSTOLIS DOUSIAS]

Apash was instrumental in the overthrow of the tyrannical Baron Graich, the despotic ruler of Whitecross, in an uprising about a hundred and fifty years ago. Though he died in the assault on Graich's last stronghold deep within the gutted arcology of Whitecross, he is popularly credited as a hero of the revolution. Humans with a desire for justice and an anti-authoritarian streak pay homage to him in a run-down temple in Pilgrim's Walk. Sermons on his Three Days – the length of time that he held out against the Baron without resupply or aid, waiting for allied forces to arrive – are delivered daily, and believers are encouraged to examine their own lives to see what sacrifices they can make to better the lot of their fellow humans.

His symbols are: the pocketwatch, a piece of human technology that allows the bearer to carry the time around with them (which never caught on in Spire) which his followers say symbolises the ticking clock of the people waiting to throw down their masters; and the trademark green waxed coat of the Whitecross guard, which he famously wore during the final assault. It's said that his bullet-ridden, stained, threadbare coat is still out there, somewhere, and anyone who wears it will be filled with his fervour and spirit.

REQUIREMENT: Join up at the cult of Apash in Pilgrim's Walk and donate something of value to the cause.

REFRESH: Donate something useful or valuable to the cause.

ADVANCES

LOW

SHARED DOMAIN. [Divine] *Your enemies call you a rabble-rouser; you say you're a hero of the people.* Select a Low advance from the Firebrand class (as with almost all advances, you may only take this advance once).

SELF-SACRIFICE. [Divine] *Apash has taught you that the solution to all your problems can be found within.* Once per situation, when you take stress to Silver, Reputation or Shadow, mark it to Blood or Mind instead.

MEDIUM

DIE TRYING. [Divine] *You don't stop until the bloody work is done.* Mark D6 stress to Mind or Shadow to cast this spell. When you do so, indicate an area (roughly the size of a house) that you're defending against your enemies. While you stand within this area, you do not need to eat or sleep, and you do not need to roll for fallout when you take stress to Blood or Mind. When the area is safe, or when three days have passed, roll for fallout.

RIGHTEOUS RHETORIC. *You have a habit of delivering furious sermons to your allies to keep them on-side, even when it might make things worse.* When a bond suffers fallout, you may roll a D6; on a 3+, the fallout is ignored. On a 1 or 2, it is upgraded to the next level.

HIGH

A GOOD DEATH. [Divine] *Your ideals keep you standing where others would fall.* As DIE TRYING, but you can defend a person, a group, a mission or an idea instead of an area.

CARABYS, THE CHAINED GOD

[COMMISSIONED BY CONAN JOHN FRENCH]

In the depths of Pilgrim's Walk, through several hidden doors and trapped portals, the god known as Carabys is chained to the flagstones. His mouth is gagged with a sutured-on plate of metal, for when he speaks, his words cause madness, death, and sin. Around him, a cadre of devoted attendants reinforce the sacred wards that keep his earth-bound form contained, and whisper secrets and promises in his ears. Amongst the truly desperate, or the truly curious, Carabys is something of a legend; he has great knowledge of all things, and can see into the past, the future, and the hearts of those who spend their lives in the city.

Carabys – or, at least, his avatar in Spire – was once a human mercenary who showed aptitude for demonology and applied aetherics, and as such was quickly whisked away by the Special Tactics division of the army and implanted with an aelfir song that would let him act as a conduit – a living magic circle through which to summon demons at a safe distance. However, the mercenary failed to unleash the full power of the demonic incursion when it was channeled through him, and instead it found purchase in his head. Filled with unimaginable powers, he escaped his handlers, and came back to Spire in search of aid.

He found none. Burned-out and half-insane at the things he had seen and wrought, he was abducted by a cult of demonologist-priests who saw him as a stable connection with the divine – the roiling, unknowable sea of energy from which demons are born. His hands were shackled, his mouth stapled shut, and his body used as a channel for secrets plucked from the aether. Carabys, whether demon or god or something altogether different, has replaced his innards almost entirely now, and he has become a thing of hidden truths. He can survive for weeks off news of a single indiscretion; a fact written down in a single book which is then burned is a fine wine to him.

Those approaching Carabys, if they can find him, are permitted by the whispering attendants to ask a question. They are tied to a chair in front of him and drugged, and they enter a dream-like realm in their own mind – or the mind of Carabys, or both – where Carabys tells them the question they are about to ask him, because Carabys knows all things. (He appears in an unchained form, in this world, and speaks politely if a little sternly to visitors.) The meeting is to determine a price, and his costs are steep.

Those who petition him are lucky to be asked to sacrifice material wealth or perhaps a finger or ear, or to perform strange, seemingly random tasks at the behest of Carabys. Those who want to know something truly special are asked to drag their loved ones to basements and murder them in service of the bound god, or lose limbs, eyes, senses. But: he is not a liar, and always follows through on his promises. It is up to the petitioner whether they wish to pay the price.

Some of the secrecy around Carabys' location is in order to hide his avatar from the Special Tactics division, who are keen to recapture it and see precisely what happened when the conduit process went awry. They are close, but not quite there yet. Whether or not Carabys wants them to find him remains to be seen; he is enslaved, here, and forced to bargain with mortals for scraps.

THE MANY [COMMISSIONED BY EVIL JON]

The Home Nations of Ys, last great stronghold of the drow, is at war with itself. It has been plagued with civil strife for a century, and many of the drow who choose a life of impoverished servitude in Spire are refugees, fleeing the burning streets of wherever they once called home.

With them, they bring fragments of their old faiths: snatches of scripture, half-remembered; a well-worn ivory statuette of a nameless goddess; scraps of sacred robe woven into their coats to repair damage. These are the old, old gods of the drow – gods of blood and darkness, gods that never saw the sky. They are chthonic and ancient and scared and fragile, and together in the slums of derelictus and on the treacherous underground trail from Ys to Spire, they formed a pact. Here, in this strange and distant and alien world, they would come together as one. As the drow who worshipped them died away and their names were forgotten, they themselves became blurred and indistinct.

Thus they became the Many, ruled by the Two, and they eschew names. They steal whatever scraps of faith they can find. They adore the drow, and they adore community, and they know that here, in the harsh grey world of Spire where the sun burns their skin, they can never ascend to the greatness they attained in the Home Nations. But: they are in the business of small miracles, and they will take what they can get.

REQUIREMENT: Be accepted into a community by one of the followers of the Many. The most common way drow are accepted into such a community is through being born into it, but the worshippers of the Many are happy for any support they can get.

REFRESH: Do something self-sacrificing for the benefit of your community.

ADVANCES

LOW

WALK UNOPPOSED. [Divine] *The shifting forms of your gods bring with them bargains and contracts older than the stone of Spire itself.* Gain the Religion domain. If you encounter a ward or ban that has been wrought with divine magic, mark 1 stress to Mind or Silver to ignore its effects until the end of the current situation. You can extend this protection to others at a cost of 1 stress per additional character blessed.

THE CHORUS. [Divine] *As you sleep, your mind is filled with the whispers of the Many, and they grant you power.* At the beginning of each session, roll on the following table; you gain the relevant abilities until the end of the session – if you already possess the abilities, gain a knack in them instead.

D10	
1.	*The Spider.* Gain the Fix skill and Academia domain.
2.	*The Stone.* Gain the Resist skill and +1 Blood.
3.	*The Tower.* Gain the Investigate skill and the Order domain.
4.	*The Beast.* Gain the Fight and Pursue skills.
5.	*The River.* Gain the Pursue skill and +1 Mind.
6.	*The Soil.* Gain the Fix skill and Low Society domain.
7.	*The Hearth.* Gain the Compel skill and Low Society domain.
8.	*The Shadow.* Gain the Sneak and Steal skills.
9.	*The Scroll.* Gain the Academia and High Society domains.
10.	*The Hook.* Gain the Deceive skill and Crime domain.

HELPING HAND. [Divine] *You are adept at helping others achieve their aims.* When you assist another character with an action, you do not suffer stress as a result of their roll. If you mark D6 stress, you can apply this blessing to the rest of your group until the next dawn.

MEDIUM

DIVINE DISTRIBUTION. [Divine] *Your gods work together to counteract misfortune; the bigger your group, the more they can do.* If you ever take stress equal to the number of player characters who are in your current situation, that stress is ignored.

HIGH

DIVINE PROTECTION. [Divine] *Your gods are shadows of their former selves, but they unite for one glorious moment, and their power is terrifying to behold.* Once per session, cast this spell. It functions as DIVINE DISTRIBUTION, but all stress equal to or lower than the number of player characters in your party is ignored. This enhanced version lasts until the end of your current situation.

MIAH, GOD OF SECRETS LOST

[COMMISSIONED BY MIAH CLAYTON]

There is a place where burned secrets go. It is small, and quiet save for the phantom whisper of a thousand thousand sins, and it is ruled over by Miah – faceless Miah, gentle Miah, who knows all and sees all. Miah is a guardian of knowledge that would otherwise be lost to time and flame, and their worshippers know of the power that is held in secrets; they can feel the potential impact of a hidden truth as though it were air pressure before a thunderstorm, and taste it like pinpricks upon their tongues. A treasured secret is held as a devotional mantra, or a relic; it is pondered over, examined, luxuriated in.

The most miraculous of Miah's blessings is the ability to forge a secret into a living being – to take that potential energy, that lead weight upon the rubber sheet that is the universe, and twist it into a different shape. These people are not aware that they are unreal, and it is probably just as well: should they discover their origin, they are doomed to a short, miserable existence of pain and an explosive death. But while they survive, their secret cannot be spoken aloud or written down, and it is thanks to the acolytes of Miah that some of the most nightmarish demonic rites are locked away from mortal eyes.

REQUIREMENT: Commit a secret of your own to Miah in the sacred flame.

REFRESH: Commit a valuable or noteworthy secret to Miah.

ADVANCES

LOW

BURN SECRET. [Divine] *You turn a secret to ashes, and it holds less power over you.* Commit a secret to the fire and mark D3 stress to cast this spell. The first time you suffer Minor fallout as a result of that secret coming to light, ignore it; if you suffer Moderate or Severe stress as a result of the secret coming to light, it is downgraded one step.

Only one secret at a time can be held in this way; if you burn a second, it replaces the first.

WEIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE. [Divine] *Secrecy is a heavy burden; it is best shared.* When someone entrusts you with a secret, gain them as a temporary bond.

MEDIUM

HIDE THE TRUTH. [Divine] *Miah's touch smoothes over misfortune and danger.* If you or an ally suffers fallout to Reputation, Shadow or Silver, mark D6 stress to cast this spell; the ritual takes an hour or so, during which the subject communes with Miah and the events that lead to the fallout are scribed and illustrated in chalk around them. At the end of the ritual, the fallout is removed.

SENSE SECRET. [Divine] *Everyone has a secret; with this rite, you can pluck it out of their head.* Mark D6 stress to cast this spell whilst talking to someone for ten minutes or so; they are aware that you are casting the spell while it happens, and must be restrained in some way. After ten minutes have passed, you become aware of the biggest secret the person is harbouring, although you have no means to prove it true. Using this power on a Living Secret will not reveal their origin to them, but will allow you to track them unerringly until the next sunrise.

HIGH

BIND LIVING SECRET. [Divine] *You can coalesce a living creature out of a secret.* Mark D8 stress to Mind to cast this spell, which takes a day to cast in full. At the culmination of a dark and powerful ritual, you condense the essence of a secret into a living being – a human, aelfir or drow, chosen by yourself. While this person is alive, the secret cannot be spoken (or written, or communicated at all) by anyone aside from the living secret.

Should they ever discover the nature of the secret that forms their being, they will be wracked with pain; should they speak it aloud, they will become unmade in a violent burst of energy and viscera, inflicting D8 stress to Blood or Mind to anyone nearby.

CAN I PLAY A LIVING SECRET?

Yes! You won't know what you're the secret of, and odds are at the start of the campaign, you won't know you're a living secret at all. If you ever discover your secret, take D3 stress to Mind at the start of every scene (and D6 stress if you're around things related to your secret); if you ever speak your secret aloud, you explode, as detailed in the BIND LIVING SECRET power.

In exchange for all this, you gain access to one additional skill and one additional domain that relate to your secret.

GARRACK, THE STEEL-BONED

[COMMISSIONED BY SEPH STEEL]

No-one is quite sure why humans ascend to godhood more than the other races. Indeed, all their own gods once walked among them as mortals – and Garrack is no different. A skilled technician cursed with a failing body, Garrack used their extensive knowledge of retroengineering to fashion replacement parts for themselves using experimental devices dragged up from arcologies or jury-rigged from spare parts; first a leg, then a hand, then a lung, and further and further, until Garrack's once-living human parts had long since rotted away beneath layers of machines and scores of attendants. (Whether the machine that is, and was, Garrack still exists today, or whether its final function was to perform as their ascension, is a matter of some debate.)

Garrack's followers crave to get closer to the divine example set by their master, and seek to understand machines as best they can, or build them into their bodies; in the complexity of interlocking components and the interplay of systems, a fraction of the divine spark of creation can be witnessed.

But doctors are few and far between in Spire, especially those willing to treat someone who tried to saw off their own hand and replace it with a device of their own making, so life in the cult of Garrack is one of red-raw puffy skin, of scabs and gristle, of blood and sawed-through bone and pain. But, the followers claim, it is worth enduring the pain to understand the holy nature of the machine, and the chance to attain apotheosis and join Garrack in the heavens is too good to pass up.

REQUIREMENT: Modify your body in some way, implanting or augmenting it with technology.

REFRESH: Repair a machine that makes people's lives better.

ADVANCES

LOW

IRON CONSTITUTION. [Divine] *The bone in your ribcage is replaced with unyielding metal; your organs reinforced with strange silver splints.* +2 blood, gain the Resist skill.

STEEL LIMB. [Divine] *Your arms and legs are cut away, and cold steel replicas are bolted to your bones.* Purchasing this advance allows you to clear the Broken Leg or Broken Arm fallout instantly. For each steel limb you bear, gain 1 point of armour; you can purchase this upgrade up to four times, but to do so on a healthy limb incurs Moderate mind fallout.

JURY-RIG. [Divine] *You are adept at getting machines running, or squeezing hitherto unexpected capabilities out of your instruments.* You can fix something in a fifth of the time it would take a normal technician to do so. In addition, you can "improve" any weapon you're carrying. Choose one of the following:

- If the weapon has the Reload tag, replace it with Unreliable
- If the weapon has the Ranged tag, replace it with Extreme Range and Unreliable
- If the weapon has the Piercing tag, replace it with Devastating and Dangerous
- Add the Spread D3 and Dangerous tags to the weapon

It takes about half an hour of tinkering and prayers to upgrade a weapon, and only you can use it; if anyone else does, it functions for a scene and then degrades into uselessness and must be discarded.

AUTOMATE PROCESS. [Divine] *You carry a bundle of multi-task machines that can do whatever you can do, as long as they don't need to do it quickly.* Mark 1 stress to Blood or Mind to cast this spell as part of an action that will take more than a few minutes to complete (searching a library, staking out a bar, etc). You no longer have to be present for the duration, as your machines will do the work for you, but you do have to return once they're finished to collect the result.

MEDIUM

CREATOR AND DESTROYER. [Divine] *Your skin spontaneously generates katakos glyphs; disciples of Garrack believe these were the marks of the priest-caste in katakos society.* Gain mastery on the Fight and Fix skills when interacting with machines.

GALVANIC COILS. [Divine] *You implant experimental batteries in your body and wire them up to your heart and brain.* Once per session, when you have a minute or so to spare, remove D8 stress from Blood or Mind as you let the glorious galvanic energies course through your body. The weight and noise of the galvanic coils mounted on your back means that you are treated as wearing armour with the Heavy tag for the remainder of your life (wearing additional armour with the Heavy tag has no further effect).

THE MASKED GOD
[COMMISSIONED BY TY YOUNG]

Who is the Masked God? This question forms the central philosophy of the Masked God, and to their worshippers, the answer is: "The Masked God is the Masked God." Their existence is bound up within their masks: without them, they are nothing, and with them, they are everything.

The Masked God is a very recently discovered deity; only in the last hundred years or so, as drow have been forced to wear face-masks and serve under their aelfir rulers in Spire, have the faithful been visited by the god. They come in dreams, or to the truly blessed, as a vision in a mirror when applying their own mask before they leave the house; they whisper truths to you, guide your hand, let you perfect your grace in presenting a different face from your own to the outside world. Beloved by actors, liars, revolutionaries and spies, they form an attachment to drow who must pretend they are something they're not as a profession or a matter of survival.

There are no temples to the Masked God, but followers will meet beneath the floorboards of other churches. They will cover unrelated altars with shrouds and swear devotion to them; they will daub paint over the faces of devotional portraits of other gods; they will repeat sermons word-for-word with every reference to the name of a distinct god redacted and replaced with silence. There is no single "true form" of the Masked God to which the faithful are privy – all their forms are true.

It would appear that the Masked God takes the form of a drow when they manifest in visions; but this is, of course, another mask.

REQUIREMENT: Live your life as another person for at least a month, never dropping the mask (even when alone). When you have done so, you become a beacon to the Masked God, and you must await their arrival.

REFRESH: Successfully pose as a different person. The more people who are convinced by the disguise, the better.

ADVANCES

LOW

SEE MASK. [Divine] *Granted divine insight by the Masked God, you see lies coil like smoke out the mouths of those around you.* Once per situation, ask the GM who's lying. They have to tell you who, but not what about specifically.

FALSE FACE. [Divine] *Your face is just a mask, and one that can be changed in an instant.* Mark D3 stress to change your face to resemble the face of anyone you've seen (in person) in the past day, for the remainder of the situation.

MEDIUM

CHOSEN OF THE MASK. [Divine] *You weave a blessing over yourself, or another, that grants prowess in the arts of subterfuge.* Mark D3 stress to Mind to cast this spell. For the remainder of the situation, you gain mastery on the Sneak, Deceive and Steal skills. You can cast this spell on another character, but you must mark D6 stress instead of D3 to do so.

LITTLE WHITE LIES. [Divine] *You channel the power of the Masked God to blur the lines between truth and fiction, and manifest something in the world.* Mark D3 stress to cast this spell. A minor lie you tell becomes the truth until the next dawn: "You look pretty" actually makes the person prettier, "I have a gun" means you have a gun, and so on. The lies must be believable for the power to work, and they cannot establish anything permanent.

HIGH

PERFECT COPY. [Divine] *You have the capacity to utterly become another person; you have two selves, and can move between them at will.* Pick someone who you have met and studied. You can, at any point, become a perfect replica of them, and everyone will treat you as though you are the person. Once you've taken this advance, you can purchase additional extra identities for a Medium advance each.

PERFECT SELF-DENIAL. [Divine] *The boundary between your true self and your projected identities dissolves until all bad things that happen to you seem to happen to someone else.* Once per session, when you suffer fallout, ignore it entirely.

GREATEST LIE. [Divine] *The greatest lies become the truth.* Once, and only once, tell a lie. It is no longer a lie.

APPENDIX 2: RANDOM ITEMS AND EVENTS IN SPIRE

The city is constantly changing and moving, and one way to reflect that is through the use of random tables – like the ones below. You might find that throwing random elements into a game can lead you and the players down unexpected, and exciting paths – so don't be afraid to use them!

WHAT DOES THE AELFIR HAVE IN THEIR POCKET?

1. A compact hand mirror and razor blade
2. A small inlaid enamel box full of teeth
3. Paper money
4. A hip flask of sweet-smelling liquor
5. A scented silk handkerchief
6. A beautiful set of keys
7. A dull and well-used working-man's pocket knife
8. A list of drow names they are trying to remember
9. A dreadful romance novel
10. Very slowly melting ice cubes
11. Their own finger bone
12. A packet of blue, a drug that instills melancholy

WHO'S THIS GUTTERKIN, AND WHAT'S WEIRD ABOUT THEM?

1. Scrut – A very young drow with no other friends
2. Rhapsody – a bent-backed creature with the widest smile
3. Chillish – A raven with a broken wing
4. But – Pale-skinned humanoid with too many bones and joints
5. Cricket – Found an aelfir mask and drags it everywhere
6. Gruppy – Entirely too insectile
7. Wipe – No legs
8. Ghuss – Serpentlike facial features complete with forked tongue
9. Bruck – Grotty little goblin, owns a gun
10. Roch – The most hideous of three siblings all named Roch

WHERE ARE WE GOING TO GET A DRINK AROUND HERE?

1. The Slot & Tackle
2. Parkers
3. The Smoking Hole
4. Beneferas' Mount
5. Cradle's Arms
6. The Riven Bell
7. Sten's End
8. The Stopwall
9. Witches' Brew
10. The Heathen's Rest

WHAT "SACRED ORDER" IS THIS KNIGHT A MEMBER OF?

1. The Hogsback Accord
2. Order of Tempered Pugilism
3. Order of the Yssian Cross
4. The Knights Crozier
5. Covenant of Sullen Acceptance
6. The Ancient and Honorable Order of the Knights of Our Resplendent Lady Limyé
7. Order of the Reforged Bell
8. Knights of the Sunken Vessel
9. Knights of the Stopwall
10. Grick's Lads

WHAT'S STRANGE ABOUT THIS TAVERN?

1. The walls are *covered* in art
2. The floor is bouncy and echoes slightly
3. It is a warren of smaller rooms
4. There is a watermark halfway up the wall
5. The barman changes on a monthly basis
6. They employ gutterkin to do the cleaning
7. It's built on stilts over the water
8. It looks like the bar was once a ballroom
9. It only stocks three different drinks and one of them is "ale"
10. The tables are high and there are no chairs

WHAT ELSE DOES THE EXPERIMENTAL RETROENGINEERED TECH DO?

1. Drains power from lights whenever it's used
2. Desiccates water
3. Completely disassembles itself after use
4. Statically charges the user
5. Discharges with a crescent moon shaped muzzle flash
6. Somehow works underwater
7. Renders the users' veins visible for a full minute
8. Becomes powerfully magnetic for a while
9. Unsettles ghosts
10. Increases localised barometric pressure to uncomfortable levels

WHAT'S GOING ON TONIGHT AT THIS BAR?

1. The saddest song you've ever heard played on a viola
2. The occupants singing ancient dock songs
3. Low-rent burlesque
4. A sort of mini casino
5. A darts tournament in full swing
6. Drinking competition with one competitor already on the floor, possibly dead
7. A fighting pit in the middle of the saloon bar
8. Old Sloane on the sten-whistle
9. Nothing – the place is deathly silent
10. A sort of dance-off

WHAT'S THAT SCHOLAR READING?

1. Divine Linguistics, a Primer
2. Hereditary lines of the ruling families of Ys
3. Lords and Ladies of Amaranth
4. Whitecross & its Environs
5. The Middenmask and other folklore
6. A Precise and Internal Reckoning of the Lesser Races
7. The Myriad Arts of the Needle, being a treatise on wound closure
8. The Gnoll: a study of genetic villainy
9. The Legend of St Beneferas (unredacted edition)
10. Goats of Spire: a taxonomy and recipe book

WHAT ART IS ON DISPLAY IN THE AELFIR'S MANSION?

1. Wet-looking watercolour of a frozen landscape
2. 11 almost identical pictures of the same aelfir, but in different masks
3. An anatomical drawing in incredible detail, but not of a creature you recognise
4. Depiction of Spire before the war
5. The sun in thick oil paints
6. A self-portrait, painted on a drow
7. Ice sculpture of a delicate six-fingered hand
8. A goat, its organs splayed and stored in glass cases, still somehow alive
9. An illustrated family tree, several stories high
10. A song, magically frozen in everfrost; you can hear echoes if you put your ear to it

WHAT HALF-STEN HORRORS DOES THE VENDOR HAVE IN THIS WEEK?

1. The Hound and the Human
2. The Witch and the Knight
3. The Towers are Silent
4. Enlisted Passions
5. Peccadilloes and Portents
6. The Mystery of the Vyskant: a Terror from Outside of Time!
7. Around the Spire in 80 Hours
8. The Ghoul with Sparkling Eyes
9. My Aelfir Prince: a Love Whodunnit
10. Lady Grendelmyn's Lover

WHAT'S THE SPIREBLACK SENSATION THAT EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT?

1. I married a blood-witch!
2. The torture gardens of Amaranth!
3. The Clarion call of the Carrion Cauldron!
4. She played dice… with Charnel!
5. Unmasked!
6. It came… from the underspire!
7. Sex-mad Lajhan priestesses – an expose!
8. Demonic orgies of the gnoll barbarians!
9. Caught in the love-webs of the midwives!
10. I survived the blood-slick streets of New Heaven!

WHAT IS THIS PLANT, AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

1. Balmswort – Neutralises acidity
2. Windflower – Grows in small crevices on the spire wall, often found in Perch
3. Tumbledown – very mild anaesthetic
4. Mothers-merry – brews into a sort of tonic wine
5. Needlethorn – Thorns regularly used for sewing
6. Cutvine – staunches minor bleeding
7. Mistresses' tear – snowdrop-like plant that grows in the dark
8. Heartsbloom – grows near the Heart, or near sources of occult energy
9. Needleflower – explodes into sharp thorns when disturbed, each bearing a seed
10. Lepis – white seed pods that catch on the breeze and flutter like moths

WHAT DO WE FIND IN THE DEPTHS OF THE VERMISSIAN?

1. Rustweave spiders
2. A huddled family trying to make a new life in the tunnels
3. Half-crazed gangs of young drow
4. A dotted line of books leading to a dark crack in the wall
5. A journal entitled "Things I Remember" with lists of mundane occurrences inside
6. A breeze that whispers
7. A cave-in that smells strongly of meat
8. Half a station with no surface access
9. A tunnel bored straight through the sepulchre of a cathedral
10. A wandering drow playing a violin, convinced he's the only thing keeping Spire standing

WHAT DOES THIS PILGRIM'S WALK PEDDLAR HAVE FOR SALE?

1. Thumb bones of the saint of spiders
2. Piece of the True Moon
3. Blood of Ishkrah
4. Sheet music that pleases the small God of Wax
5. Sun-born spireblack amber, a good omen
6. The shell casing of the bullet that killed the high priest of Stolz
7. A small bottle containing the breath of Charnel
8. Devotional candles to Lombre
9. The wrappings of Mehror
10. Blood-witch tears

WHAT ARE THEY SINGING AT CHURCH?

1. Moonlight Aria
2. Dance in the Moon Garden
3. Our Lady of Shrouded Light
4. Far From Moonlit Home
5. Be Thou My Eyes
6. As Fades the Sun's Light
7. Be Thy Champion
8. Righteous Radiance
9. Mother Always Watch Us
10. Damnou Exalted
11. As We All Revere
12. Mother of Mothers, Mistress of Light

WHAT'S THE THEME OF THIS AELFIR PARTY?

1. The fall of house Balian
2. Masquerade!
3. Paladins and Deacons
4. Imported entirely from Red Row
5. Scandalous mask party
6. Summer God bacchanal
7. Winter Goddess mourning festival
8. An art party, in which guests are encouraged to paint portraits of each other
9. "Derelictus Chic"; dress as a pauper, watch some dog fights
10. Spireside picnics

WHAT "BEAUTIFICATION" SURGERY HAS THIS AELFIR UNDERGONE?

1. Subcutaneous thorn implants
2. Skin grafts in fashionable tones
3. Subdermal everfrost, leading to steaming breath
4. Silver or gold reboning
5. Eye tattoos
6. Permanent weeping modification
7. Surgical removal of unbeautiful memories
8. Additional fingers
9. Larynx tuning
10. Wrist-lengthening

APPENDIX 3: DROW GLOSSARY

Most drow currently in Spire are third- or fourth-generation Spire-born, and so they use the same mish-mash of languages, patois and slang that the rest of the city uses (aside from the aelfir, who speak their own tongue and have difficulties communicating with the average citizen). The drow tongue presented below is one that has been enforced on them by the aelfir over hundreds of years of dominion, taking elements from the conquering language of aelfir and putting them through the lens of the two nearest drow dialects: namely Aliqua, which is spoken in the the Duchy of Aliquam, and Ys, which is spoken in the fractious Home Nations to the west.

There are also a few non-drow words in this list that are in common usage in Spire, for sake of completeness.

Sten – A low-denomination nail-like coin, used for trading among the lower classes of Spire.

Mesyé – Mr, or Sir – a formal title for male drow.

Maji – Mrs, or Madam – a formal title for female drow.

Mette – Genderless term for a superior, also used as a formal third-person plural pronoun.

Fe – Archaic term for aelfir.

Shev – Archaic term for human.

Malad – "Curse," an archaic term used to refer to drow sensitivity to light.

Fanmi – Family, community, or neighbourhood.

Shazin – A close friend or ally of the drow that is not themselves drow. Generally used for those who participate in drow religious ceremonies but who aren't of the race.

Lajhan – A "silvered person;" a priest or priestess of the drow goddess known as Our Glorious Lady.

Damnou – The old, or "proper" term for the drow moon goddess that encompasses all her forms – the light side of the moon, Our Glorious Lady, or Limyé; the dark side of the moon, Our Hidden Mistress, or Lombra; and the blood-red eclipse moon, Our Crimson Vigil, or Lekolé. Some drow view the forms of the moon as sister-goddesses rather than separate parts of a whole, which has lead to a number of brutal holy wars – many of which are still ongoing in the Home Nations.

Limyé – The drow goddess of community, healing and survival. Worship of Limyé in her form as Our Glorious Lady is tolerated by the council of Spire, and indeed encouraged when done so in conjunction with due deference to the Solar Pantheon.

Lekolé – The drow goddess of fury, swift reprisals and destruction. Veneration of Lekolé is forbidden by the council of Spire, but small pockets of worshippers exist.

Lombra – The drow goddess of secrecy, grace and power, worshipped by The Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress – the leaders of the resistance. Veneration of Lombra is forbidden by the council of Spire on pain of execution.

L'od Nansan – The Order of Blood, part of the active sects of the church of Our Glorious Lady, who pride themselves on healing, diplomacy and historical accuracy. Staunch traditionalists.

L'od Limyé-Ajan – The Order of Silver Light, a sect of the church of Our Glorious Lady that offers support and protection to drow communities. The

clergy of this sect carry moonsilver staves which they can use to channel their faith into brilliant, glowing white energy. They possess a reputation for hot-headedness and inconsistency.

Ke-deyez – "The Goddess' Heart," a popular oath. Reference to myth where the goddess plucked out her heart to make the world come alive.

Anba-deyez – "The Goddess' Arse," a popular profanity. Used to describe something of tremendous quality or value.

Leyfré – Archaic insult for the aelfir meaning, literally: "people who have icicles/ice-caves for genitals."

Darnarian – Coin from human lands, also known as "darna", "darnari" and "queens", which forms the primary trading currency throughout the known world.

APPENDIX 4: RUMOURED GOATS OF SPIRE

YSSIAN DARK – Covered in wild, coarse, brown-black coats that are woven into traditional winter gear in some parts of Ys. Mainly reared for their milk and the way that they don't mind being underground for years at a time.

SUPRAVERTICAL BOK – Wiry, mad-eyed, single-minded. Like to get as high up as possible, often to the point of climbing other goats. Have evolved to use tools, in as much as they can build rudimentary levers to upend heavy bits of masonry to drop on attackers.

HEXITONGUE – Three-eyed, rare, absurdly magical. Prized by occultists who use their polluted souls to power nightmare rituals.

WHITECROSS RED – Stocky, cantankerous, delicious, hard to outwit. Worshipped by a cult in Whitecross known as Caprinites, who have the ability to turn into goats at will. Few turn back.

LUCKY MYOTONIC – Faint at the drop of a hat, but while unconscious, seem to be impossible to harm due to a protective brooch a distant ancestor ate in the mists of time. The stolzian cult of Silver Quarter view them as sacred animals and many high-ranking members keep them as pets.

LATCHKEY FIDDLER – Small, cheeky, often escape from captivity due to their unique ability to pick locks with their tongue and horns. Fond of breaking into houses, eating everything in the pantry then falling asleep in the sock drawer.

DEEP GOATS – Strange, egg-laying goats with unsettlingly human-like hands that gather in groups of exactly seven near the Heart. They seem to have developed a rudimentary method of literature, but upon closer inspection it looks like they just like playing with books. Some Vermissian scholars and wards have attempted to train them as guards for the Vault with varied degrees of success.

KABRITIKON – Mighty horned beasts that roam the plains outside of Spire; barely worth hunting or farming on account of the way they taste (also the way that the tallest among them is easily taller than a drow). The Duchess of Aliquam insists on riding a "tame" one, draped in bronze and silver jewelry, to all official functions.

HELL ROARERS – Given to yelling banshee-like wails whenever possible; rambunctious, exuberant and brightly coloured (depending on their ancestry, they vary from blue-green to orange-yellow). In the avant-garde circles of Ivory Row, having a hell roarer in your house is considered vital to throwing a good party.

APPENDIX 5: KNOWN ARCOLOGIES, AND DISCOVERIES FOUND THEREIN

Hundreds – perhaps thousands – of years ago, a technologically advanced race lived in the lands in and around Spire. Known to humans as the Prokatakos, or more colloquially just "Katakos", these long-lived people dug deep into the ground and established cities, outposts and fortresses called arcologies. It is in these arcologies that humans have found examples of the technology that the Katakos had mastered, and they have been used to propel their backwater civilisation into the forefront of a mechanical golden age.

HARMONIOUS SUMMERCOURT: Located beneath the peaceful village of Summercourt, this arcology stretches out for miles in strange, spiralling tunnels that sing and whistle at the behest of huge, magically-powered fans. Currently, a research team is experimenting with the effects of the songs on crystals in an attempt to harness the power of extradimensional vibrations.

MAGWAN PORTH: It was here, deep within the heart of a mountain, that humans discovered the mysterious engines that powered the Vermissian; but in Magwan Porth, the engines never tired, scoring their routes maze-like into the rock despite their masters having died long, long ago.

THE BLESSED ISLE OF WHITECROSS: Whitecross, once a sacred site to many humans, is an arcology situated far to the west where the race discovered stable gunpowder deep in the ruins of a crystalline kingdom. Whitecross has since been all but mined out, and all the best and brightest examples of humanity have left for better things – working in Spire, learning from the gnolls in the southlands, or setting up shop in one of the many bustling trade ports that line the Eastern Domain. It is a grim place, full of monsters, that is home to a dour and sullen people.

TEMPLE HEAD: Multiple delvers have entered the labyrinthine depths of Temple Head, and all of them have returned empty-handed save for reports of rune-encrusted doors blocking the shifting, unmappable paths within.

DEEPEST BRAZACOTT: Brazacott is the hardest-won arcology yet found by the humans, and they spent years trying to infiltrate the caves through multiple layers of iron-hard stone. In the depths of Brazacott, standing within a thrumming network of wires and glass, beats the glowing heart of what is theorised to be a node from a centralised system of exchanging information utilised by the Katakos. The node was extracted and splintered

into many pieces so it could be better understood by the scientists of the humans, but it has since been lost.

FOUR WINDS: Here, in what scholars believe to be a distant outpost of the ancient civilisation that used to span these isles, the humans discovered an intact rotary-fire rifle strapped to the inert form of an ancient, many-eyed metal guardian. All attempts to open the guardian and examine its inner workings have proven fruitless.

HORIZON: Horizon provided the humans with one of their most fascinating discoveries yet – a device that draws air in through one end and propels it out of the other at great velocity. Though they have not been able to recreate it or even build an inferior copy with much success, the current Wanderer-King of the Eastern Domain – Rosevear the Ingenious – has built it into a broad-winged flying machine called The Eagle that he uses to tour his lands.

DAMNED SALTASH: Whatever happened in Saltash is too cruel and horrendous to be repeated; the names of the explorers have been stricken from the records by Quintrel the Kind, the most sympathetic of the Wanderer-Kings of the humans. Saltash, now sealed by rockslide and guarded by a sacred order of masked fighters, gave the humans the Dose as well as a wide variety of other body-rewriting chemicals, treatments and drugs.

APPENDIX 6: ANTAGONISTS

To add colour to any plot, roll once on the City-level table and twice on the Street-level table below to see who else is involved in the situation – the City-level faction is in charge, and they (directly or indirectly) control the two Street-level factions. If you do it twice, you could generate an entire campaign frame with a bit of work to figure out what they're fighting over.

Street-level

D100	RESULT
01-05	Red Row drug dealers
06-10	Order of Knights of the North Docks
11-15	Azurites
16-20	An Idol with zealously loyal followers
21-25	The Crimson Vigil
26-30	Gnoll refugees
31-35	Cult of the Hungry Deep
36-40	A coven of blood-witches
41-45	Jaeger mercs, out to make some extra cash
46-50	Hustlers from Hemlock Fruit Market
51-55	Priests of Our Glorious Lady
56-60	Low-rate Silver Quarter Casino
61-65	Liberate! The Drow Independence Periodical
66-70	Struggling City Guard outpost
71-75	The Furnace, a sensationalist gossip rag
76-80	Gladiators from Arena
81-85	Silver Quarter Hellfire Club
86-90	Desperate Retroengineers
91-95	Ivory Row Sunlight Collective
96-00	Concerned Citizens

City-level

D100	RESULT
01-05	A different cell of ministers, better-equipped than you
06-10	University of Divine Magic Professors Esoteric
11-15	The Solar Basilica
16-20	Arms dealers from the Works
21-25	Disillusioned army captain
26-30	The Special Tactics Corps
31-35	High-ranking leader of an aelfir mystery cult
36-40	Cult of the Machine God
41-45	City Guard captain
46-50	Cut-throat demonologist scholars
51-55	Aelfir noble attempting to get onto the Council
56-60	Debauched aelfir noble, looking for a thrill
61-65	The Intelligence, a crystalline prokatakos mind
66-70	The Academy of Gywnn-Enforr
71-75	L'Enfer Noir club
76-80	The Cult of The Spire Ascendant
81-85	A dissatisfied Council member
86-90	Ivory Row Landowner
91-95	The Morticians
96-00	The Midwives

APPENDIX 7: SUGGESTED MEDIA

Here are some sources that we drew inspiration from during the creation and playtesting of Spire, or that we feel evoke similar themes.

MUSIC

The best music for Spire, bar none, is located on Tabletopaudio.com where you can find seven specially-made ambient tracks designed to evoke different parts of the city. Failing that, though:

Bloodborne soundtrack
Only Lovers Left Alive soundtrack
Devil is Fine – Zeal & Ardour
Chalice Hymnal – Grails
Midnight Radio/ Gore Motel – Bohren & der Club of Gore

BOOKS/COMICS

Gormenghast
Neuromancer
Perdido Street Station
Iron Council
The Discworld series, especially the Watch books
BLAME!
Hellboy
The Lies of Locke Lamora

ROLEPLAYING GAMES

Unknown Armies
Hunter: the Vigil
Changeling: the Lost
Dark Heresy, with particular reference to hive worlds

FILMS

Dredd
The Raid
Dark City
Blade Runner
Hellboy 2

TV

The Wire
Peaky Blinders
Blackadder
Breaking Bad

OTHER

Fallen London
Sunless Sea
Bloodborne
Necromunda

PLAYER NAME

CHARACTER NAME

CLASS

DURANCE

SKILLS

- Compel ☐
- Deceive ☐
- Fight ☐
- Fix ☐
- Investigate ☐
- Pursue ☐
- Resist ☐
- Sneak ☐
- Steal ☐

DOMAINS

- Academia ☐
- Crime ☐
- Commerce ☐
- High Society ☐
- Low Society ☐
- Occult ☐
- Order ☐
- Religion ☐
- Technology ☐

KNACKS

EQUIPMENT

REFRESH

ABILITIES

BONDS

FALLOUT

FREE SLOTS

☐☐☐☐☐

☐☐☐☐☐

☐☐☐☐☐

☐☐☐☐☐

☐☐☐☐☐

☐☐☐☐☐

RESISTANCES

CURRENT STRESS

Blood

Mind

Silver

Shadow

Reputation

Armour

TOTAL STRESS:

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INDEX

Academia, Districts and Factions of 81
Academy of Gywnn-Enforr 87
Acting as a group 10
Additional Resistance Slots 11
Advancement 25
Aelfir 5
Aelfir District 99
Aelfir Masks 109
Aelfir Traditions 5
Airlarks 96
Allied Defence HQ 149
Amaranth 107
Ammunition 21
Antagonists 210
Apash, The Martyr of Whitecross 189
Arena 102
Armour 22, 79
Ashter And Quinn 165
Auras 55
Avatars, Aelfir 169
Azurite Class 29
Azurites 99
Ballistae 96
Battlefield, The 86
Beast of Vat A-67 123
Benevolent Order of Wisdom and Discovery 81
Black Guard 109
Blood Vintages 145
Blood-witches 133
Blue Port 97
Bond Fallout 15, 24
Bond Level 24
Bound 121
Bound Class 33
Bound NPC 121
Brazacott Technical Institute 83
Brook Street Bridge 133
Brother Hellion's Church of The Gun 102
Buying and Selling 19
Canals, see Penfold Canals
Candlegate Station 131
Cannibal Extra Advance, see Faithful of King Teeth
Cannibals of Grist 117
Carabys, The Chained God 191
Carmine Sceptre, The Order of 92
Carrion-priest Class 37
Carter's Expeditionary Force 136
Castle, The 91
Cathedral of Our Glorious Lady, The 155
Cave, The 135
Cell Structure 159
Character Creation 25
Charnel-sworn Hyena NPC 170
Church of Absolution 118
Church of the Gun Extra Advance, see Hellionite
City Guard, Extra Advance 69
City Guard 146
Civilisation (Bar) 119
Combat 77
Combining Bonds 24
Commerce, Districts and Factions of 89
Computational Division 87
Core Mechanic 9
Corpse Pit 136
Council, The 151
Creating Your Own Fallout 15
Crime, Districts and Factions of 101
Crimson Vigil, see Our Lady of Vengeance
Crystal Temple, The 109
Curse 5, 11
Customs House 97
Dark Elf Virtues 155
Dark-farmers 123
Demonology 82
Derelictus 117
Destera 3
Difficulty 10, 178
Domains 17
Dovecote 121
Drow 3
Drow Traditions 5
Drugs 104
Druidic Chorus and The Keepers of The Hives, The 170
Duke of the North Docks, The 89
Durance 25
Endless Bacchanal 136
Endline 129
Enlisted, Extra Advance 70
Enlisted 150
Equipment 19
Eternal Canals, see Canals
Executioner, Mortician NPC 139
Extra Advances 69
Fae Monarchy 95
Faithful of King Teeth, Extra Advance 71
Fallout, Minor 13
Fallout, Moderate 14
Fallout, Severe 15
Fallout 11
Firebrand Class 41
Followers of The Gun NPC 102
Forge of Sun-On-Water, The 127
Fortune Telling Methods 144
Game, The 115
Gamesmaster Advice 174
Garden District 121
Garrack, The Steel-Boned 197
General Snow-on-stone 149
Generic Advances 69
George, from Pilgrim's Walk 165
Ghost NPC 134
Ghost Plagues 139
Ghosts 140
Ghoul NPC 118
Glossary 205
Gnoll Research Post 135
Goats, Rumoured 207
Grace, Concept of 159
Grand Telescope, Inverted 85
Graveyard of Small Gods 119
Graveyards 143
Greymanor Investigator, Extra Advance 71
Greymanor Services 127
Gutter 119
Gutterkin 103
Hall of Ancestors 140
Hallows, Extra Advances 158
Hallows 157
Hanging Gardens 123
Heap, The 91
Heap Denizen NPC 92
Heart, The 133
Hellionite Extra Advance 72
Hemlock Fruit Market 117
Herald Corporation 124
High Elven University of Divine Magic 85

High Society, Districts and Factions of 107
High Street, The 92
Hive, The 149
House, The 113
Humans 5
Hungry Deep, Extra Advance 69
Hungry Deep NPC 118
Hydroponic Vaults 123
Ice Caves 109
Idol Class 45
Infinite Library 86
Initiative, Lack of 77
Instrumentalists 96
Intelligence Shards 83
Interview Rooms 86
Ishtuk, God of Personal Demons 185
Ivory Row 110
Knacks 18
Knight Class 49
Knightly Orders 49
Knight of the North Docks NPC 89
Known Arcologies, and Discoveries Found Therein 208
Kowz-udder 106
Lajhan Class 53
Last Leg, The (Bar) 93
Last Train 131
Laws of Spire, Specific 147
Lecture Hall 87
Lekolé, see Our Lady of Vengeance
Levelling up, see Advancement
Little Whitecross 88
Living Spire 124
Low Society, Districts and Factions of 117
Low Wall Boarding House 97
Luck-priest of Stolz 73
Lunar Font 86
Luxulyan, The Duke of Air 187
L'enfer Noir 103
L'enfer Noir Staff Member NPC 103
Machine Heart, The 127
Magic, Availability 181
Magic, Stress 11
Maintainers, The 157
Making Your Own Weapons and Armour 22
Mansion, The 137
Many, The 193
Masked Class 57
Masked God, The 199
Masks 107
Megacorvidae 95
Mercenaries NPC 99
Mercenary Houses 97
Mermaid, The 114
Miah, God of Secrets Lost 195
Midwife Class 61
Midwives 144
Minister Extra Advance 73
Ministry, The 181
Ministry Initiation 160
Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress 157
Moon Garden, The 134
Moonseekers of Grimaldi 170
Mortician Guards NPC 140
Morticians, Guild of 137
Mother Moon's Harem Member 102
Multiclassing 25
Necrofusimancy, Cult of 142
Necropolis, The 140
New Gods 183
New Heaven 169
Noble House of The Drow 67
North Docks, The 89
NPC Bonds 23
Obsidian Orrery 141
Occult, Districts and Factions of 129
Order, Districts and Factions of 146
Original Spire 153
Our Lady of Vengeance 131
Paladin NPC 167
Paladins, The 166
Parliament of Gutterkin 128
Partial Stress 9
Peace Street 134
Penfold Canals, see Eternal Canals
Perch 119
Pilgrim's Walk 163
Polaris Station 131
Printing Presses 125
Ptolemy Bay 127
Random Items and Events in Spire, Tables of 200
Range, The 91
Range 21, 79
Rats, The 131
Refreshing, see Removing Stress
Religion, Districts and Factions of 155
Religions, Big List of 166
Reloading 79
Removing Stress 10
Sample Knacks 18
Sanderson's Arms 92
Secret Police 147
Silver Quarter, The 113
Sisterhood of Illumination 82
Skald Units 150
Skills 17
Sky Docks, The 93
Skywhales 95
Small Gods of Perch 119
Solace 91
Solar Basilica, The 165
Solar Devotee Extra Advance 74
Solar Pantheon, The 167
Soldier, Extra Advance see Enlisted
Speak With Dead, Ways to 141
Special Tactics Corps 150
Spiral Gardens 110
Spire, Reasons for It Being Here 7
Spire Ascendant, Cult of 86
Spireblack 124
Spirit Host 140
Street of Gods 165
Stress 10, 79
Student NPC 87
Suggested Media 211
Sundered Bell, The 91
Sunlight Collective 111
Sun-on-earth, The 169
Temple of Mehror 143
The Hidden 111
Threadneedle Square 103
Three, The 111
Tower Division 88
Undying, Rules for Being 139
Undying Surgery 138
Unlidded Eye, The 81
Vanishing Point 137
Vermissian, The 129
Vermissian Sage Class 65
Vermissian Vault 133
Vigilite Extra Advance 75
Vigilite Firebrand NPC 163
Vigilite NPC 163
Villain, Creating One 179
Volatility Research 87
Vorloren Standard 102
Vorloren Standard Guard 103
Vyskant 76, 135
Weapons 21
Weapon Tags 21
Wizened Weasel, The 93
Works, The 124
World of Spire, The 3

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